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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Gracious God, thank You for this moment of prayer in which we can affirm our unity. Thank You for giving us all the same calling: to express our love for You by faithful service to our Nation. So much of our time is spent debating our differences that we often forget the bond of unity that binds us together. We are one in our belief in You, the ultimate and only Sovereign of this Nation. You are the magnetic and majestic Lord of us all who draws us out of pride and self-centeredness to worship You together. We find each other as we praise You with one heart and express our gratitude with one voice.

Together we accept the unique role You have given our Nation in the family of nations. We praise You for Your truth spelled out in the Bill of Rights and our Constitution. Help us not to take for granted the freedom we enjoy. May a fresh burst of praise for Your providential care for our Nation give us a renewed patriotism. Keep us close to You and open to each other as we do the sacred tasks of our work in the Senate today. In the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. Amen.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able acting majority leader, Senator LOTT, is recognized.

THANKING THE SENATE CHAPLAIN

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, we want to all express, again, our appreciation to our very fine Chaplain for his daily in-

vocations of blessings on this institution and our God's guidance.

SCHEDULE

Mr. LOTT. Having said that, I want to announce that there will be a period of morning business this morning with Senators permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each.

It is expected that around 12:30 we hope to get some agreements with regard to what issues will be brought up this afternoon and exactly what time. Those agreements certainly could involve consideration of the Department of Defense authorization conference report, as well as the START II treaty. The Senate also will consider the continuing resolution during today's session.

All Members, therefore, should anticipate that there will be rolcall votes today. The leadership is trying to accommodate all of the Senators' various wishes, and changing schedules. We will try to get an agreement and action on the critical issues as soon as agreement can be reached.

I yield the floor, Mr. President.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GREGG). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The acting leader.

SCHEDULE

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I apologize to the distinguished Senator waiting to speak but, with reference to the schedule, I would like to make a couple of comments, if I could.

Also, of course, there will be conversation today about the START II bill.

I want to commend the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, who is

here on the floor, for his effort to get a quick turnaround on this conference report agreement. It is bipartisan. Several of the problems that existed in the previous conference report have been removed and a compromise has been worked out. I am sure it is one that neither side is 100 percent happy with, but it is one that I think we should support, and we should move quickly today. I know we have indications that the President will sign this bill. I believe the ranking member of the Armed Services Committee will support it.

So, I hope we can get a quick agreement to move forward on this Department of Defense conference report. We hope to be able to announce something on that in the next few minutes.

Also, there has been an understanding with regard to time that will be used on START II. Hopefully, we can take that time and move forward on that bill, also.

On the continuing resolution, I would like to point out to our colleagues here in the Senate that there has been a lot of work done on this continuing resolution. Again, there has been a lot of give and take. The proof of that is the fact that it passed the House of Representatives last night by an overwhelming margin of 371 to 42. Only 42 voted against this continuing resolution. So truly it was a bipartisan effort. I have had some contact with the negotiators on that package. They certainly worked very hard, and they came up with what is good for now. It will take us to March 15 and give us additional time to get agreement on the appropriations bills that have not passed this body. Hopefully, the Labor-HHS and Education appropriations bills can be moved through the Senate. I remind my colleagues once again that this is where that issue languishes—right here in the Senate.

The White House has indicated its support for this continuing resolution until March 15. So, it is bipartisan in

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the House, it is supported by the administration, and we need to act on it because we do have the deadline of today, January 26, of the present continuing resolution. If we do not act this afternoon and get an agreement to move this continuing resolution to the President, then we have looming before us the possibility of another Government shutdown. The headlines last night on the television news reports and this morning were very positive. An agreement is reached to open the Government.

Now the Senate should act quickly to follow the example set by the House. We should not delay this continuing resolution. We should move it through following the example set this time by the House of Representatives. Yet, we are being told that, oh, well, there may have to be several votes. There may need to be some amendments. Certainly any Senator has a right to offer amendments, but I urge them to think very carefully about what could happen here this afternoon. If we start amending, or trying to amend, this continuing resolution, if amendments are not laid on the table, then we could have a real problem. If we amend that continuing resolution, it could mean that the shutdown of the Government would begin over the weekend. We would have a real problem.

The House of Representatives acted responsibly. They have done their work. And they have recessed until next week. So I urge my colleagues here in the Senate to think about this. If you do start offering amendments and some of them, in fact, do pass, then you are flirting with real danger. And the blame will be on the Senate. It will be on those who offer these amendments which should not be considered in this forum and should not be considered on this bill.

So, I hope that we will get an agreement on all three of these issues, take them up in speedy order, and complete our work this afternoon.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Several Senators addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

THE DOD CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, I am very pleased that we were able to get another Defense authorization bill, and I want to commend Senator LOTT, Senator WARNER, and Senator COHEN, who have joined with me on the conference committee to get this done quickly. We have a good bill.

I suggest that we act on it and that it be the first thing we do. I do not think we need more than 45 minutes to decide; in other words, an hour and a half to complete this bill and sign it away. I hope it can be taken up at this time. I understood, generally speaking, that it would be taken up. I think people generally feel that it is to be the first thing taken up today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

THE SUCCESSES OF THE PAST YEAR

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I was glad the leader spoke about optimism and the opportunity to do things. I want to talk just a little bit, if I may, in morning business about this past year and the successes of this past year.

It seems to me that we have worked very hard. We have worked very long. We had to do a number of things to respond to the voters in 1994 who said the Federal Government is too big and it costs too much. Anyone who thinks that making that change from where we have been is easy is a bit naive.

So I think the Republican majority in this Congress has had great success. We restructured the debate in this country and have a whole new approach changing the direction of Congress and, frankly, changing the direction of the President. After 30 years of basically dealing with the Great Society and what this group has done time after time, which is talk about how much more we can spend, there has been no balanced budget for that whole time, but simply a rush to spend more and increase taxation. We have turned that around this year. We changed the debate from where it has been for a very long time.

As to the continuing resolution, the President is probably going to sign it. They say this President is responsible. The Congress is responsible for spending, and it is our responsibility. We are the trustees that have that to do.

I am, frankly, very proud of what we have done this year. For the first time, we presented a balanced budget to the President. Unfortunately, he vetoed it. I do not think the President wanted a balanced budget at that time. But now we are talking about how you reduce spending, how you reduce the size of Government rather than how much it could grow. For the first time, we will make today a downpayment on a balanced budget. We will have a budget at the end of this year that will be in keeping with our 7-year effort to do that. That is progress. That is, I think, a significant victory that should be claimed. It is the first step on the road to success.

What about the change in the President's behavior? I think that is significant as well. Three years ago the President talked about more spending, and about investment. He talked about stimulating the economy through spending. And we had the largest tax increase in the history of the world. Two years ago we were talking about placing one-seventh of the entire economy under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government in health care. This year the President is talking about the era of big government being over. Now, if that is not a change. I am delighted for that. A year ago the President pre-

sented a budget none of which balanced. The President is under pressure, I think, from the Congress to present a balanced budget, and that is a movement forward.

So I think this is a great victory for the American people and for future generations. Have we completed our victory? Of course not. Is it good enough? No. Is it a good start? Yes. We probably succeeded in three-quarters of what we set out to do. Did the President make the needed changes in entitlements? No. But he did make some accommodation. He talked about some choices in Medicare. He talked about some caps on Medicaid. He talked about a commitment to welfare. Those are changes. And until we make those, of course, there is no real budgeting. But that is where we have come.

We are talking now about the end of big government. The debate is not about growth, but how we reduce the size of government. These are the things the President talked about before the election. But now we are back to that. I think that is great. I am excited by the opportunity to do that.

Thomas Jefferson said that we do divide naturally in this country, regardless of what the party is called, between those who think there ought to be an elite governing and we take the money from the folks and provide the programs and those who believe people ought to take care of themselves and the Government's role is to create an environment in which the private sector can work. We are still divided that way. That debate, of course, will go on.

So, Mr. President, I think today we ought to say we have had a very successful 1995. We have changed the debate. We are structured differently. We are talking about the possibilities of reduction instead of the certainty of increases. We are talking about a balanced budget, and we have begun and made a downpayment on that. There is a great deal to do, of course, but I believe we ought to recognize that we have made a victory, that we have made some real progress, and that we ought to move forward.

There are other things we need to do. We need to deal with welfare. We need to deal with regulatory reform. We have some health reform that we ought to do. We have to empower the States to be able to do more of those things so there is flexibility and fit. We have to accept, probably most of all, the responsibility for paying for the benefits that we are now providing instead of putting it on the credit cards for our kids and our grandkids.

So, Mr. President, I hear a lot of grumbling and wondering and confusion. It seems to me that we have had a good year. We have done a very difficult thing, and that is make a fundamental change in the direction that this Government is taking, one that I think is good for America, it is good for all of us as citizens and taxpayers and, maybe most of all, it is good for our kids and our grandchildren.