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Senate

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

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's prayer will be offered by guest Chaplain, Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Rabbi Stuart Weinblatt, of Congregation B'Nai, Potomac, MD, offered the following prayer:

As we gather together in this hallowed Hall and sacred institution, we pray dear God for guidance and wisdom, for temperance and prudence.

May this body's quest for justice be tempered by mercy and compassion.

May those who have been chosen to serve this great Nation be imbued with the sense of awe and humility which will enable them to execute their duties with decency, dignity, and sanctity. May their actions, deliberations, and decisions be made with the recognition that all are created in the image of the Almighty. May they be guided by the ethics and ethos of the treasured teachings and eternal words of wisdom which have inspired people throughout the ages.

In that spirit, we note that this time of year is referred to on the Jewish calendar as Tu B'Shevat, the New Year of the Trees.

Since ancient times, this day, in the dead of winter, serves to remind us of the human responsibility to care for the Earth, affirms the importance of planting trees, and thus asserts the intricate relationship between humanity and the environment in which we live.

And so, may we be inspired by the custom of planting trees this season, and of the concept of recognizing the importance of giving back to the Earth. May we be inspired by the work of the Jewish National Fund and by those who have contributed to this effort which has helped to bring this

message to people throughout this Nation and who have planted trees and forests throughout the land of Israel.

May we learn to plant at all seasons.

May we plant seeds of goodness and kindness, of virtue and benevolence. In so doing, may we sow the seeds of a just and reverent society. May our deeds be like trees—firmly rooted and giving much nourishment and sustenance.

May we be touched by the Jewish tradition's teachings which likens trees to wisdom and life itself; so too may we bring that message to others.

Let us say amen.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, there will be a period for morning business until the hour of 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each. At the hour of 12:30 there will be the swearing in of Senator RON WYDEN of Oregon.

I now ask unanimous consent that immediately following the swearing in, the Senate stand in recess until the hour of 2:15 today in order for the weekly policy conferences to meet.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BURNS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DOLE. Mr. President, following the policy conferences, the Senate will resume consideration of the farm bill, in which there will be a cloture vote. I am not certain when, but probably early afternoon. Under the order, the cloture vote is on the Leahy substitute amendment. All Senators have until 12:30 today to file first- and second-degree amendments to that substitute.

We would like to complete action on the farm bill today. It is very important all across America. We have had a real effort to come together in a bipartisan manner. We have not been able to achieve consensus, but I think there is still a lot of bipartisan support for the Leahy substitute. If we need 60 votes, we hope we will have the 60 votes.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ASHCROFT. I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WELFARE

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, the business of the Senate has been consuming and demanding this year. The debate over the balanced budget amendment and the debate over the achievement of a budget which will protect the fiscal integrity of this country and bring us into balance in the next 7 years has been an important one and it is a necessary one. It has consumed much of our energy and the opportunity of this Senate.

I think it is important for us to understand while this is a task which must compel and will compel our attention, it must not do so to the exclusion of another important agenda that is essential to the progress that the American people sent us here to make. The American people not only sent us here to protect the fiscal health and integrity of the economics of the United States of America, but they expect us

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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to protect the physical health and the integrity of the people of America, in particular of the people who have been the victims of a welfare system the consequences of which have been tragic, to say the least.

The welfare reform debate is not a debate about a revolution for a change. It is literally a debate about a revolution for survival. If we do not reform the welfare system there are going to be continuing numbers of individuals who simply will not survive in America because our welfare system not only dehumanizes and devalues them, but it literally threatens their continuing existence.

The welfare reform debate is not just about change, it is about restoring hope, restoring dignity to the lives of individuals where hope and dignity have been destroyed. The missing ingredient in the current welfare system is the ingredient of hope, and the recipe for recovery must reinstitute hope. There is a structural problem with the current exclusively governmental system which precludes hope, which must exist if people are to get back on their feet.

This is a matter of human survival and national sustenance and survivability. If our society is to be sustained, to survive to be successful in the next century, we must end the current welfare tragedy. It is tragic, indeed, that the Congress, which has acted to help end this tragedy, has been met with a Presidential tragedy: That is, the President has vetoed the effort of the Congress to stop this human cost of America's greatest tragedy, our welfare system.

The President had the opportunity to reform the system but he vetoed it. Congress acted to stop rewarding illegitimacy, and the President vetoed it. Congress acted to stop penalizing marriage, undermining families, and the President vetoed it. Congress acted to stop the culture of entitlement, where individuals are conditioned to expect from Government rather than to work within themselves to solve problems, and the President vetoed it.

The tragedy of our welfare system is borne out in the lives of the children of America, in the horror stories of opportunities that have been dashed, futures that have been destroyed. I will not burden you with a litany that is all too familiar, but I think of one of the children, little Ariel Hill, who was less than a year old when she died, weighing only 7 pounds at her death. Her mother was an addict sustained by a system which makes no judgment about behavior, but just continues to reinforce behavior regardless of its counterproductivity. Her mother, irritated with Ariel's crying one afternoon, scalded her in a sink of hot water. When the investigators came to the apartment after Ariel's death, they found a list of the children in the household and the amount of welfare that each child brought to the family.

That is the tragedy of the welfare system where children, the most valu-

able resource of a society, develop a value only in the devaluing checks of an entitlement system. It is time we reform that system. We had an opportunity to do so and the President vetoed it. We cannot leave this task undone because the President vetoed welfare reform measures. We must proceed to change the system.

Our system has been rewarding the wrong values. We have rewarded decadence—the out-of-wedlock birth rate has exploded from 5.3 percent in 1960 to 33 percent in 1995. That is up to 80 percent in some of the cities of this country. We need to replace that system, which values decadence and rewards it with checks, with a system that values and rewards decency.

Our system has rewarded dependence. More than 3 million of the 5 million welfare recipients will be on the rolls for more than 8 years. The average length of time a person is on the welfare system is 13 years. It is a system that rewards dependence rather than discipline. It is time for our system to be changed. The opportunity that we had, and that we capitalized on to reform the system, would have substituted discipline for dependence. It is time for our system to reward discipline.

We have established, as the way of operating in Government, a system of debt. We need to replace that system of debt with a system of dignity, of integrity, of paying for the things we consume rather than displacing the costs of what we consume to the next generation. But the devaluing system of welfare dependence and decadence has been a system which has driven the debt.

We simply have to make a commitment within ourselves that we are not going to let this issue die. We are not going to walk away from the mandate of the American people to wage a war on poverty. We cannot leave in place a system that subsidizes decadence, that subsidizes dependence, that encourages debt—no. Our war on poverty will have to have a fundamental element of hope and will have to replace decadence with decency, replace dependence with integrity, independence and work, and replace debt with discipline.

The welfare reform measure which Congress passed provided us with an opportunity to change our current system—an opportunity that was extinguished at the hand of a President who vetoed welfare reform. We must reform a system which is not only costing children in many cases their lives and their futures, but is undermining a set of values upon which this country must march forward.

We must not turn our backs on this tragedy. We can ill afford to think that because there is a controversy on the budget that we can exclusively focus on it. We must address it. We must continue to be involved. But this war, this opportunity for change, cannot be confined to a single front. The budget is important, but we have an operation

on the right, an operation on the left, and we have a revolution to wage in terms of rescuing what we believe is the greatest of all the cultures that have ever graced this planet, the free culture in the United States of America. We cannot turn our backs on the tragedy of welfare.

So, today I rise, grateful for this opportunity to say we must look again to the responsibility that we have, to the call which we have received, to the demand which the American people are making upon us, to the expectation of this culture and to the duty we owe young people. It is a duty to protect, yes, their fiscal integrity and their financial futures, but it is also a duty to protect the very lives and the values and the potentials which they have. When we subsidize decadence as opposed to decency, when we subsidize debt as opposed to dignity, and when we subsidize dependence as opposed to integrity and industry, I believe we have to change that system and change it dramatically.

So, I thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to speak, to remind the U.S. Senate that its obligation is substantial, its opportunity is significant, and the consequences of inaction could be as tragic as the system which is the status quo, because, unless we act to reform and to change it, we will have to live with it. And living with it has had deadly consequences.

Mr. GRAMS addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

OF POLLS, POLITICIANS, PROMISES, AND PRINCIPLES

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I hope my colleagues made time last week to study a poll printed in the Washington Post. It took a close look at the American people and their relationship with the political process, and it was, at the same time, both enlightening and frightening.

Mr. President, 40 percent of those responding to the poll did not know the name of the current Vice President; 40 percent of Americans were not aware that Republicans control both Chambers of Congress; 56 percent of the people surveyed could not name even one of their Representatives in the Senate; and 74 percent were not aware that we serve 6-year terms.

Fully 67 percent of the people who answered the survey did not know that the U.S. Senate had passed a plan to balance the Federal budget.

The newspaper makes the argument that the problem lies in education—that the more knowledge an individual has about the political process, the more likely they are to care about what we are doing here in Washington. But I think an equally compelling case can be made that after decades of broken political promises, the voters have been conditioned to tune us out. They do not care about us because they believe that, deep down, we really do not care about them, either.