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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m., and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

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

Blessed God, here we are at the beginning of another day. Help us to believe that what we commit to You this day will come to pass if You deem it best for us. We need to experience the peace of mind and body that comes when we do what You guide us to do and then leave the results to You.

Bless the Senators with the profound peace that comes from giving You their burdens and receiving Your resiliency and refreshment. May this be a great day because they, and all of us who work with them, decide to rest in Your presence and wait patiently for Your power to strengthen us. Through our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable LINCOLN D. CHAFEE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island, led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. L. CHAFEE. Mr. President, today the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m. and will begin consideration of S. 2603, the legislative branch appropriations bill. It is hoped that an agreement regarding debate time and amendments can be

made so that a vote on final passage can be scheduled for this afternoon. Under a previous consent agreement, there are 40 minutes remaining on FEC nominees Brad Smith and Danny McDonald. Votes on those nominations, as well as the judicial nominations debated yesterday, are expected to be stacked this afternoon. Senators will be notified as those votes are scheduled.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for not to extend beyond the hour of 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 5 minutes each.

Under the previous order, the time until 10:30 a.m. shall be under the control of the Senator from Illinois, or his designee.

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for 10 minutes in morning business.

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

Mr. WELLSTONE. I thank the Chair.

CROP INSURANCE

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I come to the floor of the Senate today because—and I speak with some sense of timing—I come from an agricultural State.

In the next several days we could very well have a crop insurance reform conference report out here on the floor.

There is at least some discussion, some thought, and maybe some probability that included in that conference report will be about \$7 billion of economic assistance for family farmers, which essentially will be more AMTA payments.

When the Budget Committee allowed for up to \$7 billion to go to assistance for family farmers in the country, whether it be Minnesota, whether it be Montana, or any other State, I think all of us believed and hoped that this would be far superior to emergency appropriations, and that we would have the agriculture authorization committee do some fairly important investigation and analysis of the best way to get this financial assistance out to family farmers.

In my rush to come down to the floor, I did not bring with me the exact statistics, but basically the reports that we now see on what are called AMTA payments suggest that entirely too much of this money goes to those in least need. In other words, it is a subsidy program. Last year, it was to the tune of about \$16 billion in inverse relationship to need. The top 10 percent of the producers—some of the big corporations—received over 60 percent of the benefits, and then the farmers received the rest, so that a family farm in Minnesota would be lucky to get maybe \$2,000 worth of assistance; whereas, those huge operations were raking in \$100,000 worth of assistance.

If we just take the \$7 billion and put it into this conference report without any committee hearings and without taking at least several weeks after we get back to do some evaluation and some important analysis about how to get this assistance out to the people who need it the most, then I think we have not lived up to our responsibility as Senators.

I say to my colleagues that I think we could at the very minimum, for example, make sure that this money goes to producers. Those who own the land

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



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but aren't involved in the production receive too much of the benefits. The benefits ought to go to the producers.

I would also say to my colleagues that there is no reason in the world that for fiscal year 2001 we can't focus on equity and get the loan rate up at least to the rate for soybeans, in which case corn would be \$2.11 and wheat would be \$3.10. Let me tell you that is the direction we need to go for a State such as mine.

I sent a letter yesterday to Chairman LUGAR, my colleague, a Senator for whom I happen to have a tremendous amount of respect. I will certainly get a chance to talk with him today. I believe that we are making a big mistake if we simply put this money into a conference report, which means there will not be any real discussion and no real debate. We will not have paid any attention whatsoever as to how we can allocate this financial assistance out there in the countryside so that the lion's share of the benefit goes to the farmers who are in greatest need.

Why in the world do we want to use the same AMTA formula which gets subsidies out to farmers in inverse relationship to need? Why not some careful consideration and some careful discussion? Isn't that what we are about as legislators?

Too many times now in the Senate we see the same pattern of important decisions not being made by virtue of taking, in this particular case, what I think is an important question and just putting it into a conference report with no opportunity for amendments and no opportunity for discussion. I think that would be a big mistake. Instead, we can surely decide on a better formula for getting the money out there to the people. At the very minimum, it ought to go to the producers. It ought not go to landowners who are not even involved in production.

Again, we have an opportunity for fiscal year 2001 to literally talk about equity and at least get the loan rate up for other farmers and other grain farmers that are equal to what we do for soybeans.

As a Senator from Minnesota, as a Senator from an agricultural State, I come to the floor today to take issue with the direction in which we are going and to urge my colleagues not to put this financial assistance money into the crop insurance bill. But instead let's do the kind of work that we ought to do as legislators. Let's do the kind of evaluation we ought to do as legislators so we can get the help out there to people who need it.

Farm income is going to go down 17 percent again this year. There are a lot of farmers in my State. Many are going to be driven off the land.

If we are not going to write a new farm bill as an alternative to this "freedom to fail" bill, which is one of the worst pieces of legislation ever passed by the Congress or ever signed by a President, then I don't think we are going to write a new farm bill until

after the election. At the very minimum, we ought to do our best to get the assistance to the people who need it the most.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. I ask unanimous consent to speak for 10 minutes.

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

(The remarks of Mr. BAUCUS pertaining to the introduction of S. 2617 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. WELLSTONE. How much time remains on the Democratic side?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Fourteen minutes.

Mr. WELLSTONE. I ask unanimous consent for 5 minutes to speak in morning business.

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

BANKRUPTCY CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, sometimes we use morning business to have a chance to speak about legislation we introduce. Sometimes we use morning business to make a plea to colleagues. Sometimes we use morning business to convey a message. I want to convey a message to some Senators about conference reports and the way we have been conducting our business.

Right now with the conference reports—and I am specifically talking about the bankruptcy bill—we don't have a conference committee. We have a shadow committee because Democratic Senators are not involved at all in the deliberations. There are some rumors going around in the Senate that Republicans will basically reach an agreement on the conference report on bankruptcy. Democrats will not be involved in this deliberation at all. So we have not had a conference committee meeting. We will know what is in that conference report when it is on our desk.

That conference report dealing with bankruptcy, believe it or not, American public, could be put into an unrelated conference report such as a conference report dealing with crop insurance. There is no longer any scope of conference rule so it can be completely unrelated. Again, that is a new way of doing business in the Senate. My argument is that is no way to do business in the Senate.

I believe the minority should be involved in the conference. That is a real conference. I do not believe the way to do business is for Democrats to find out what is in the bill when it is put on our desk. I certainly don't think this bankruptcy bill—which is so harsh and so egregious in its effect on the most vulnerable citizens in the country, while basically calling for no accountability or responsibility on the part of the big credit card companies—should

be put into an unrelated conference report such as one dealing with crop insurance.

I use my time as a Senator today to say to Senators that if that happens, and I hope it won't, if that should happen tomorrow, for example, when we are supposed to go on recess, I think that would be outrageous. I will oppose it. I will speak out against it and do everything I can to block it. We would be here for days. I think there are other colleagues who will be also outraged, especially at this effort to put a shadow conference report on bankruptcy, with Democrats not even being involved—and all the reports are that the bill is getting harsher and harsher, not better—into an unrelated conference report with a day to go before we are supposed to go into recess. If that happens, I want to be clear, I don't intend to be jammed. I do not intend to roll over on it. I intend to speak out against it. I intend to point out to the American people all the ways in which this is egregious legislation and the impact it will have on them and their families. That will take time. I think other Senators will join me.

I hope we do not conduct our business that way in the Senate. I hope I do not have to do that. I hope, instead, we will do what we need to do with the legislative branch and with judicial nominations, with the nomination of Brad Smith, have those votes, get onto other work, but not have last minute efforts to sort of jam legislation into unrelated legislation and attempt to ram it through here without the deliberation and without the discussion.

I do not think that is the Senate at its best. I certainly, as a Senator from Minnesota, cannot represent people in my State and people in the country that way, and I will not. I will challenge it. So I hope it does not come to that.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, 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. DURBIN. 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. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is my understanding we have until 10:30 in morning business on the Democratic side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

GUN CONTROL LEGISLATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, a little over a year ago in Littleton, CO, at Columbine High School, there was a shooting incident which shocked America. We saw in that high school an event which we did not believe could happen in the United States, where students could get guns through a gun