

determination to deal with it in this Congress. We cannot simply sit idly by and watch 6 million people—maybe more next time—as they are disenfranchised when they attempt to exercise their constitutional right to vote and participate in our political process.

I appreciate the attention of my colleagues on this issue, and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, first of all, I appreciate the comments of the distinguished majority leader on this issue. From the very beginning, he has been a very strong and vocal advocate of this body and the Congress of the United States in fashioning a piece of legislation that would address not just the events of last year. As the majority leader properly points out, this was not a one-time event in one jurisdiction. In the consistent reports, whether by MIT, CalTech, or the General Accounting Office, and surveys done by the media, that analyzed the election last year in Florida, all of these organizations that analyzed it, including the Carter Commission, the story has ultimately been about who wins or loses. That has been the headline.

The real story is about the pathetic and tragic situation of our electoral system of this country. It didn't happen in one event and in one State. It is in all 50 States—some worse than others—and has been going on for years.

So those of us who have been involved in this issue over the last several months, my colleague from New York, Senator SCHUMER, my colleague from New Jersey, Senator TORRICELLI, members of the Rules Committee, have been stalwarts in this effort going back to the earliest days in January, cosponsoring legislation, reaching out, trying to fashion some proposals that would make the Federal Government a true partner with our States and localities in trying to correct a wrong that is in desperate need of being addressed.

Senator MCCONNELL of Kentucky is the ranking member of the Rules Committee, as the majority leader knows. He has a deep interest in this subject matter. I want the majority leader to know that Senator MCCONNELL and his staff—Senator KIT BOND of Missouri and his staff—brings a separate set of issues that he is particularly worried about, the issue of fraud. We have been working with Senator SCHUMER's staff, our staff. There have been serious negotiations, I say to the leader, over the last number of weeks, actually going back even further than that, but most intensely in the last few weeks. We have not yet arrived at a product we can present to this body that is a bipartisan proposal.

I will let Senator SCHUMER speak for himself, but it is my fervent desire, I say to the leader and to my friends on the other side—Senator MCCONNELL and Senator BOND, obviously, they do not need me to speak for them, but I

know it is their desire as well to fashion legislation of which all of us can be proud.

I know the events of September 11 have obviously taken over the agenda and debate. It is hard to imagine a year ago what we were in the middle of. We were in the middle of one of the worst debacles in terms of a national election in the history of the United States, and it was not just about Florida. It was in almost every jurisdiction. In my State alone, we have not bought a new voting machine in 26 years, and the company that made them no longer exists. We had an election in one of my communities in Connecticut a few weeks ago where the incumbent officeholder did not receive a single vote in his own hometown because the machines did not record them, which shows us we can go anywhere we want and we will find this system is in need of work.

I say to the leader I appreciate immensely his comments. We are pretty close to getting an agreement. I hope we can. I also take to heart what he has said, that we have been patient in trying to work this out. My hope is we can come to the Senate with a bill that involves ideas and thoughts that we can all live with that will address the problems. I also appreciate his comments that if that is not possible we will come to the Senate with a bill to debate this issue and bring people to the table. We cannot go on and not address this issue.

The majority leader has said it far more eloquently than I can. It would be a travesty of significant proportions if this Congress were to convene and adjourn in the wake of what happened in the election of 2000 in this country and not step up to the plate and offer the kind of assistance our jurisdictions so desperately need. For those reasons, I thank the leader for his comments, and I yield to my colleague from New York.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, we are out of time under the unanimous consent agreement. I ask unanimous consent that we not enter into recess until we have accommodated the remarks of the Senator from New York and the Senator from Idaho.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I will be very brief because I know we have other business to do. I thank the majority leader, who I know has to get over to the Democratic caucus, for his wonderful leadership on so many issues. This is a man who believes strongly in so many things, including the right to vote. I say to the majority leader, Senator DODD has done a superb job. He has had the patience of Job and the persistence of whatever Biblical character was very persistent.

We are all proud of the job he has done. His leadership in bringing up this issue as soon as we can come up with a compromise, or next year if, God forbid, we cannot, is vital to America.

I wish to add one point, aside from my thanks to the Senator from Con-

necticut, our chairman of the Rules Committee, for doing such a great job on this. I have been proud to be working with him. My point is this: He made an excellent point, that we almost have forgotten about, the wrenching agony we all went through, whatever party, a year ago last November. There is one point that, if anything, September 11 should increase our ardor and our fervor to bring forward a good bill, hopefully a bipartisan bill. The terrorists hate our right to vote. They want a group of religious leaders controlling everything and not letting people make any determination.

The beauty of America is we can vote, and our job as Senators, our job as citizens, is to perfect that right so nothing stands in the way. Unfortunately, too much stands in the way. Usually not by design but, rather, because we have not paid attention. Malfeasance, we are going to correct that.

The Senator from Connecticut has taken on a great leadership role and brought together Senator MCCONNELL and Senator BOND and myself in hours and hours of painstaking meetings. We talked today. We are willing to move in the direction necessary to get a bill. It is heartening to know we will be voting and debating on this issue in this Congress, if not this year, no matter what happens. I just pledge myself to the Senator from Connecticut to follow his leadership to continue those efforts because the issue of the right to vote, the ability to vote, the enfranchisement of all Americans, no matter how rich, poor, or of whatever race, there is no higher duty.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I thank our colleague for his remarks. I note again our staffs are working. I want these remarks to be seen as constructive and positive. We appreciate immensely the work being conducted by my friend from Kentucky and my friend from Missouri and their staffs who have spent a lot of time on this issue. It has not gone smoothly. It has had its ups and downs. It has been a roller coaster ride. I hope when the process is over, sooner rather than later, we will present the Senate a bill for which they can be proud.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN THE SENATE

Mr. CRAIG. Senator BOND and Senator MCCONNELL are not in the Chamber. I know their work with the Senator from Connecticut is dedicated to the end we all want to see in reform because there is an obsolescence to the voting system that has to be addressed. I think that is without question. I guess my only frustration by the majority leader's comments was earlier this week he talked about bringing a farm bill to the Senate. We now have a railroad retirement bill. We still have appropriations to do, and several conference reports coming out of that, and we hope yet a stimulus package now

that we know America truly is in a recession. We have known that for some time, but it is now officially proclaimed.

Not in any way to lessen the importance of a debate over election reform, and that is important, I cannot yet quite understand how we get all of this done in time to get out for Christmas.

Before the Thanksgiving recess, I had offered Senator BOXER of California an opportunity to join with me—she from the Democratic side, I from the Republican side—to organize Christmas caroling for the Senate so we could join together in unity, as we have for the last several weeks, and sing Christmas carols on the eve of Christmas.

I suggest if we are going to do election reform, if we are going to do a stimulus package, if we are going to do a farm bill, and I add an energy bill because I think right now energy is every bit as important to the American consumer as election reform is to the American voter, and let us see what else is on that schedule—oh, yes, I forgot, railroad retirement reform—then it is going to be a merry little Christmas in Washington for all Senators who cannot make it out the night before to their home States. My State is about 2,500 miles further away than the Senator from Connecticut. So I say to Senator DODD, have yourself a very merry little Christmas.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate at 4:48 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 5:30 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. REID).

THE SENATE SCHEDULE

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, we have just completed our caucus. I know the Republicans were caucusing. I am not sure whether they have completed or not. I want to report to the Senate about our current circumstances and what the schedule might be for the remainder of the week.

Senator LOTT and I have been discussing the current schedule and our circumstances involving the railroad retirement bill. My hope is that we can move to proceed to the bill sometime within the next hour. If that is the case, it is my intention to file cloture on the bill at some point this evening.

It is also my intention that we seek unanimous consent to vote on cloture on Monday. We will not be in session on Saturday, but we will be on Monday. We will also entertain amendments. It is my understanding that Senator LOTT may be recognized to offer an amendment, and we will have a debate on that amendment tomorrow and on Monday.

My expectation is that there will not be any votes tonight or tomorrow but that we will have votes on Monday at approximately 5 o'clock.

Senator MURRAY reports to me that the Transportation conference report has now been completed, and it is my hope that we can vote on the Transportation conference report perhaps as early as Monday. If not Monday, then on Tuesday. My hope is that if we can achieve cloture on the railroad retirement bill on Monday, we can bring debate on the bill to a close by Wednesday.

It is then my intention, as I have said on several occasions, to make a motion to proceed to the farm bill. That is a must-pass piece of legislation. It is my hope and expectation that we can complete our work on that, maybe even as early as the end of next week.

I also note that we have made the decision over the course of the last few hours, and in consultation with Senator LOTT as well as our caucus, that we will be in session and voting the week of December 10. That has been an open question until now. But we have now made that decision. Our expectation is we will be voting every day the week after next. Senators ought to be on hand and prepared to vote all week. Of course, it may be that we will have to vote and be in session the week after that. But clearly, for the next 2 weeks the Senate will be in session and Senators need to be prepared to be on the floor and voting, to accommodate the remaining schedule we have for the remainder of this session of Congress.

I also presented to the caucus what amounts to an informal agreement on how we will proceed on the economic stimulus bill. I am pleased to report that our caucus has agreed with the proposal that has been presented to me by the Speaker, as we consider how to proceed on the economic stimulus bill. If we can reach a procedural agreement tonight, it is my expectation we can move to substantive negotiations on the economic stimulus bill tomorrow morning. It is my hope we can work on it through the weekend, if that is possible, in order to try to expedite our work on that bill and our efforts to reach some final agreement early next week.

The procedural agreement would call for consideration of the Senate Finance Committee bill, the House-passed economic stimulus bill, and other issues relating to those two bills. We do not exclusively limit our consideration of economic stimulus to those two vehicles. There are a lot of other issues out there.

Senator DURBIN in particular has expressed to the caucus on numerous occasions, and here on the floor, how important it is that we consider a payroll tax holiday. That is an issue I have indicated I am particularly interested in and intrigued with. I don't know whether or not we have the ability to work it into the agreement. I know

Senator DOMENICI has expressed an interest in the proposal, and Senator LOTT has noted his support for the proposal.

On our side, I don't think there has been any more ardent a supporter, any more articulate an advocate of the so-called payroll tax holiday than the distinguished senior Senator from Illinois. I applaud him and appreciate his tutorial to the caucus on the issue. He has been able to bring us to a better understanding of how it would work. I must say I am indebted to him for all of his work in advocating that particular issue.

But my point is that that, along with other vehicles, is going to be considered as we debate the issue in the hope that we can bring some resolution to our negotiations sometime early next week.

I see the Senator standing. I am happy to yield to him.

(Ms. STABENOW assumed the Chair.)

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the leader for his kind remarks.

I hope that in the course of this economic recovery or economic stimulus package we can still stick to our principles that what we do will help the economy, help the right people in the economy, and not do any long-term damage to the economy.

I think this proposed Federal payroll tax holiday, month-long holiday, meets the criteria. Frankly, it will go to workers across America who draw a paycheck. They will see it on payday. It will come as quickly as we can pass the bill and enact it into law. That is money that families can use for important purchases at the end of the year. It is money that will go right into the economy and spark some growth and some activity that we really do need. It is also money that is going to go to workers, to those making incomes up to \$80,000—\$80,400 is the limit on the Federal payroll tax. So that really gives it to working families.

In addition, it is focused to help small businesses because I think forgiving this tax for employers will say to small businesses, we are going to help you meet some of your expenses, whether they are health insurance premiums or security needs, for your business after September 11.

I have spoken to Senator DOMENICI. I thank my friend and the majority leader for his reference. I hope in the course of this conference, putting together the stimulus and recovery package, that this can be included.

Mr. DASCHLE. I thank the Senator from Illinois. His comments make my point. He is not only knowledgeable and articulate on the issue, but he has certainly persisted in ensuring that this piece of legislation be considered along with many others.

Madam President, there are several key areas the Democratic caucus—and it goes to the point raised by the Senator from Illinois—will be advocating.

First and foremost, I want to emphasize again because I feel the need every