



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 108th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 150

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2004

No. 131

Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we praise Your greatness, might, and majesty. You are all that is in Heaven and Earth. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and You are exalted above all. Both riches and honor come from You and in Your hands is power. Your compassion never fails.

Bless our Senators as they strive to do Your will. Give them wisdom and courage for the living of these days. Bless the Members of this body who will be leaving us. May they find fulfillment in the knowledge that the full harvest of their labors is yet to come.

Unite us in the common endeavor of making America a beacon of freedom for our world. May all we say and do in the days to come truly honor You. We pray in Your powerful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I welcome everyone back for the final wrapup of the 108th Congress. I was just speaking with the Democratic leader, and we were remarking that we have a lot to do in a short period of time over the course of the week.

There is a lot going on in terms of orientation of new Senators who will not officially take office until January, but there are also leadership elections occurring today and tomorrow. I expect that in this brief session, which will bring the 108th Congress to a close, we will finish before Thanksgiving for sure. And as we sort out both the agenda and work that has been accomplished over the last several weeks, we will have a much better and clearer idea as to when we will finish this brief session.

I know everybody is anxious to get back to their families after this week or week and a half and to spend time with constituents and begin enjoying the eventual holidays and planning for the year ahead.

I look forward to working with the new Senators as they come onboard, and the leadership, as the leadership elections occur. I think we will all join with a renewed commitment to working together, working across the aisle, working with civility and respect for the traditions of the Senate. I think we will be able to build effectively on the accomplishments we have achieved to date in the 108th Congress.

Over the next several days, we have a lot of business, with three essential pieces of business that must be addressed. The nine remaining spending bills for fiscal year 2005 are currently being addressed in what is called an omnibus bill. It is a bipartisan bill. There has been huge progress over the last several weeks as staff and Senators have been working together on this very important bill.

Second, we have intelligence matters and an authorization bill for the Intelligence Committee that is currently being addressed, as well as legislation that is currently in conference that addresses the 9/11 Commission reform recommendations, an effort we began to aggressively address in late July once the 9/11 Commission Report was released, and immediately Senator

DASCHLE and I set a course that has been followed pretty much as we intended. That is, following hearings, we would discuss and write a bill in the Senate and pass that bill, and the House likewise.

Conferees were appointed several weeks ago, and the conferees have been working constantly to generate and produce a bill that I am very hopeful we will be able to bring to the floor later this week.

The third issue is the debt limit. Secretary Snow informs us that we have a short window of opportunity to get the debt limit accomplished. The Treasury Department estimates that Congress must take action by Thursday in order to prevent the Federal Government from defaulting on the debt. Discussions have been underway in the last several days and will be underway today as to how best we accomplish that.

We have some scheduling challenges that will occur over the course of this week, a little bit later in the week. It obviously is an issue we will be addressing. I am confident we will be able to take the necessary steps to avoid even any consideration of default.

In addition, there are a number of other issues that we will be addressing, such as nominations that we would like to settle in this 108th Congress. Those discussions are underway. We have the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA. The House and Senate conferees will be meeting on Wednesday to approve the negotiated language. So I expect we will be able to pass that bill by the end of the week and have it on the President's desk before we adjourn.

Briefly, with respect to the schedule today, we will be recessing at 12:30 p.m. in order for the Democratic policy luncheon to meet. This side of the aisle will be conducting our leadership elections in a policy meeting tomorrow.

Today, we will reconvene at 2:15 p.m. to begin consideration of the nomination of Francis Harvey to be Secretary

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



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of the Army. The order provides for up to 3 hours of debate, and if all that time is used, we will be voting at approximately 5:15 p.m. today. We will be updating Members this afternoon as it becomes clear how much of that debate time will be necessary.

We will be having discussions with leadership over the course of the day on the debt extension bill as to how we will plan that out in terms of voting so people will be able to have their schedules accommodated for especially Thursday. As all of our colleagues know, the Clinton Library will be inaugurated at that point in time, and we will be making appropriate accommodations for voting.

I mentioned the appropriations process. I do think we are going to be able to carry out closure on those negotiations quickly and that we will have something for action sometime this week.

We in all likelihood will remain here this week and finish our work on the appropriations bill—hopefully this week, obviously very late this week. We will keep Senators notified as to the schedule.

I mentioned the Intelligence reform bill is still in conference. Members were working late last night and are in through today. As I mentioned, it has been nonstop. I am very hopeful we will be able to complete that bill as well.

In short, in closing, there are a very few days remaining. We have a lot of scheduling challenges. I will be looking forward to working with our counterparts on the other side of the aisle in addressing the business with the expectation, if at all possible, that we will be able to complete work this week, which would be the objective. Again, that is a lot to accomplish in the next several days.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democrat leader is recognized.

THIS WEEK'S AGENDA

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I want to acknowledge the work the majority leader has clearly laid out as an agenda that I think both sides wish and hope we can accomplish this week. There is a lot to be done but a lot has been done.

The distinguished chairman of the Appropriations Committee has worked diligently these past weeks to reach a point where we have agreement, as I understand it, on all but one of the bills. That will allow us to expedite consideration of the appropriations process this week.

A lot of work has been done on the 9/11 Commission. Even though we still have not resolved some of the remaining questions, I hope Senators—and House Members especially—would refrain from extraneous issues because

that only complicates our ability to complete our work.

There is a lot of effort that has been made now on the nominations package that has been the subject of a great deal of discussion and negotiation for many weeks. As the distinguished majority leader has noted, there is a possibility that we could also do IDEA. I think that would be a great culmination of the effort that has been made throughout the last several weeks as we have looked to completing that work before the end of the year.

So much remains. Much has been done. We hope to work very closely with our Republican friends to make this as productive a week as we can.

We are also appreciative of the majority leader's willingness to accommodate the schedule for many of us to allow for the travel to Little Rock to attend the dedication ceremonies for the new Presidential library, the Clinton Library.

It will be an exciting week, a very busy week, and one that I hope, at the end of the day, will be a very productive one as well. I look forward to working with the majority leader in that regard and will have more to say on many of these bills as the week unfolds.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 5 minutes each.

Who seeks recognition?

The majority leader is recognized.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE 108TH CONGRESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I will be very brief. I just want to make a few more comments since we have a few minutes before 12:30 and I see we do have another Senator in the Chamber who is desiring to speak.

Over the 108th Congress, we have worked hard to move America forward. Indeed, we have gotten results. We have an economy now that is rebounding with job growth that is robust; 2.4 million jobs have been created since August of last year with 14 straight months of job gains. We have unemployment down from its 6.3 percent peak last year. Unemployment rates have fallen across categories of race and age and all levels of education. Inflation remains low. Interest rates remain low. Our tax cuts clearly have had a huge effect on the economy. Americans today enjoy more of their hard-earned money to spend, to save,

to invest as they choose. We have home ownership at an all-time high including among African Americans, where it is at an all-time high. Health care security has made huge advances.

We have a lot more to do. Many of these issues played out in the recent elections. I think, as we all begin to plan for the next Congress, clearly health care will remain high on that agenda. We have a lot to be proud of in this Congress in addressing health care security for seniors, addressing Medicare modernization, strengthening of Medicare with the biggest reform package in the last 40 years. All this translates down to better health care security for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

For the first time, Medicare will cover the most powerful tool we have in medicine today and that is prescription drugs. That is a huge service to seniors to give them the health care security they deserve. That is a good first step. Again, we have to come back and look and make sure we continue to strengthen Medicare over time.

Over the last week, as I traveled around the country, I have taken the opportunity to ask about these drug discount cards we have made available through Medicare. Indeed, 4 million seniors today have these Medicare discount cards that give them discounts of 10 percent to 25 percent, which they simply did not have before we passed that legislation.

I do want to remind low-income seniors who have not yet signed up for one of those prescription drug cards that if you sign up for one of those cards, it has, in addition to those discounts, \$1,200 of value on it and \$600 of that value will go away after January 1 of next year. So I encourage you to sign up for those cards. If you have any questions, as most seniors know, you can call 1-800-MEDICARE and have those questions answered.

Health savings accounts—a lot is being written about them in the newspapers today. In fact, in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan, medical savings accounts for the first time will be made an option for us in the Senate and for the 8 or 9 or 10 million Federal employees around the country. Indeed, I look forward to signing up for a health savings account myself here as we reenroll in the next several weeks.

The President's agenda for the upcoming Congress is going to be vigorous. I had the opportunity to meet with the President yesterday, and with the Speaker of the House. Although we focused mainly on finishing the work over the course of this week, as I mentioned in my opening statement, I am very excited about the agenda, the vision that is laid out for next year.

As I also said in my opening comments, I look forward to working aggressively across the aisle, with civility, in a bipartisan way, as we address this agenda that the American people really deserve. The issues are many.