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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable LINCOLN CHAFEE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Merciful God, You have been good to us beyond our deserving, surrounding us with light and music, beauty and friendships. Thank You for Your eternal love and for the little miracles You give us each day. Lord, You give us sunrises and sunsets. You provide us with air to breathe and heartbeats. We hear Your love in the roar of the oceans. We see Your sovereignty in the flight of the eagle.

You protect us from dangers, seen and unseen. You cause the weapons of our enemies to fail. Help us to show our gratitude by moving beyond rhetoric to deeds.

Empower our Senators to trust You to guide their steps. Bless them as they seek to transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Give them peace for turbulent moments and anchors for life's storms. We pray this in Your serene Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable LINCOLN CHAFEE 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 6, 2004.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable LINCOLN CHAFEE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. CHAFEE thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning the Senate resumes consideration of S. 1072, the highway bill. As we announced last night, there will be no rollcall votes today. Chairman INHOFE will be on the floor this morning, and Senators are encouraged to come to the floor to speak on the bill. When we complete our business today, we will reconvene on Monday for more work on the highway bill. As I previously announced, we expect to complete this bill next week. I will be consulting with the chairman and the Democratic leader as to the specific schedule and will announce that later today.

NEWS UPDATES

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I want to make a few comments on the news, and give a quick update on the events that have happened in my own mailroom earlier in the week.

First of all, just a few minutes ago, this morning, with regard to the employment situation, we have been given very good news. The unemployment rate is at 5.6 percent, which was little changed, but the nonfarm payroll em-

ployment increased by 112,000, with job gains in construction and several service-providing industries. Indeed, that is very good news. That is 112,000 new jobs in January.

If we look back to last August, we have seen a creation of 366,000 payroll jobs. These numbers are very good news. It demonstrates we have turned the corner. But, clearly, we have a lot more work to do as we go forward. So there is very good news today on the job front; the trends are in the positive, right direction. But, again, we have a lot more work to do.

The economy is doing well. I say that very quickly, and say we have a lot more work to do in job creation. But, again, that figure of 112,000 is very good news.

Mr. President, on another front but timely in terms of the news itself, I am delighted to report we are ahead of schedule in getting Senators back into their offices here on the Capitol grounds. As everyone knows, in response to the attack on my office with what is a deadly poison by the name of ricin, we immediately focused on the safety and welfare of the staff throughout the Capitol complex. Through a very comprehensive plan, a comprehensive response, even though I know it has not been handled just perfectly, and there are a lot of frustrations, I am delighted to report nobody has been hurt, everybody is safe, and that includes people here in my office, in the Dirksen building, the Senate office buildings, the Capitol complex, and, indeed, the postal system in this country.

All testing has been negative, with the exception of the testing right around where the discovery was made. The Russell Senate office building has been opened now for 2 days. The Hart Senate office building opened yesterday. The Dirksen office building we will be making announcements about over the course of the day.

On a third issue, Mr. President, I am delighted to see the response to the

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



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Medicare legislation we passed has been very positive in a number of ways. According to press reports, over 100 companies, agencies, and organizations have filed or are filing applications to participate in that prescription drug card that will be available to all seniors this summer.

To me, that demonstrates a real interest and a fierce sign of competition and a lot of people participating in addressing the issue of health care, health care costs, prescription drugs, and making prescription drugs more available to our seniors. This is a strong indication there will be a very positive and broad interest that this full benefit, once it is available, will be taken advantage of.

Also, earlier in the week we saw Medicare HMOs are, in response to this bill, slashing their premiums, making these premiums come down, therefore lowering that burden that falls on the senior in terms of out-of-pocket costs. At the same time, they are increasing their benefits in response to this bill, and expanding their service to more and more seniors, with the opportunity for more and more seniors to participate in integrated health care plans.

This is a real stark contrast to what we had seen in the past where there were shrinking choices. Now there are going to be expanding choices. We are already seeing that take place.

We began this Congress making the promise we would bring about strengthening the Medicare system and expanding the choices within the Medicare system and lowering the burden in terms of out-of-pocket expenditures and costs to individual seniors, and we have delivered on that promise. We made the promise that seniors would have access to better health care, and we have delivered on that promise by providing preventive care and prescription drugs for the first time really in Medicare today.

So the plan is working. The new discount cards will be available for our seniors later on this spring.

Mr. President, on a related issue, I want to comment on a silent epidemic that is in this country and that affects a lot of people who are listening to me right now—my colleagues and others who are watching through the various media. It has to do with an epidemic that a lot of people don't recognize that is occurring that can affect your health care and my health care and that of our colleagues and our families. It can be brought to focus by a single question that I want to ask every American; that is, are you positively sure that you don't have high blood pressure right now? If you can't answer that question yes or no, then you need to find out. Are you positively sure that you don't have high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is hypertension. If you can't answer that question, just listen to me for a couple minutes on this important issue. The American Heart Association calls hypertension,

or high blood pressure, "the silent killer." We call it hypertension, and it is high blood pressure just like the pressure in a tire. If you are pumping up a tire with too much air, a bicycle tire or an automobile tire, it gets higher and higher. And literally, when they put that blood pressure cup on your arm and they measure to get those two numbers, the one and the slash and then the other number, it tells you how much pressure is in your body.

The higher the pressure in your body, once it gets out of a certain range, the more likely you are to die, whether that be from heart disease, because it causes hardening of the arteries, or a stroke. It is as simple as that.

When a person's blood pressure is too high, the heart is having to pump too hard. The heart is a pump. You have the rest of the body and the resistance of the blood vessels themselves. If it gets too high, it is like too much pressure in a tire. Or you can think of taking a thin coffee stirring straw and you are trying to blow through that as hard as you possibly can and the pressure that builds up strains the heart, which is a pump, and the blood pressure. If that pressure builds up over a period of time, because it is that way all throughout the course of the day—heartbeat after heartbeat, day after day—it damages everything that is downstream from the heart and the blood vessels—the brain and all of the organs. That is my physiology lesson.

The point is, it is widespread. This is not just a few people. There are about 50 million people in the country today who have high blood pressure. Remember, if you have high blood pressure, you are going to have heart disease or a stroke or myocardial infarction, coronary artery disease, or atherosclerotic heart disease.

The interesting thing about that is that a third of those 50 million people don't know they have it. That is why I am taking time on the Senate floor to address it. Because if it is 50 million and a third of them don't know they have it, all you have to do is put a blood pressure cup on your arm and then we have treatment for it. We can save thousands of lives if people will just act.

I also want to relate that to what I just mentioned about Medicare itself. As legislation comes through this body, it is important for us to think like that, to take every opportunity to improve the legislation, if it can be as direct as that in terms of saving lives.

With the Medicare prescription drug bill this body passed, that the President signed in December, for the first time in the history of this great Medicare Program, once you hit 65, that blood pressure cup and that physical exam becomes part of the program. That is amazing to me.

Traditionally, people who came into Medicare didn't get that physical exam because it was not provided in the program. It is today. It was not 2 months ago. Thus, if you had hypertension

throughout your life and you hadn't gone to the doctor because you hadn't been in a motor vehicle accident or you didn't like doctors, when you got to be 65 and on Medicare, at 70 and 75, and you have hypertension, it is never diagnosed. But in this Medicare bill, we included an entry physical exam so you make the diagnosis. That is step No. 1.

Also in this Medicare bill for the first time in the history of Medicare—a wonderful program, 40 years we have had this fantastic program; I just told you diagnosis is there for the first time—there is the treatment. Never before in the history of Medicare have prescription drugs, which is the way you treat most hypertension today, been available through the Medicare Program itself. Yet that benefit, that better health care, because we passed this prescription drug bill and Medicare bill, is available.

So those two things: Diagnosis is going to be made. Remember, 16 million people in the country don't know they have it. So we are going to make the diagnosis. And then after the diagnosis, we don't leave people high and dry. We give them help. We don't give them all their prescription drugs. We never promised we would give them all their prescription drugs, and we shouldn't give them all their prescription drugs. We probably can't afford it. But we have helped every senior who has hypertension who didn't have access to prescription drugs to get prescription drugs. We have helped every single one and low income. We have really helped.

We see why this Medicare bill was important. People argue \$400 billion is too much, or it is too little. Everybody is getting it from both sides. The point is, for the first time we have preventive care, we have early detection, and we increase the likelihood that a senior can get treatment for this life-threatening disease.

I should also mention that African Americans, of that 50 million people with hypertension, are disproportionately affected. So they have this additional benefit both in terms of diagnosis and treatment. Look at hypertension and high blood pressure today. African Americans are disproportionately affected.

I am gratified for this major advance in the Medicare bill. There are lots of things in the Medicare bill such as this that we didn't talk very much about on the floor of the Senate, but because we made reforms like that to Medicare, lives will be saved. More Americans are going to get the care that they deserve, and more Americans are going to get the treatments they need. That is what is in this bill. Hypertension is a good example. More lives will be saved.

Let me go back to the question I asked: do you know what your blood pressure is? What is it? I know what my number is. I am a physician. I think about it all the time. But you need to be able to know. Is it high or low? No. 2, if you haven't had it

checked recently, go have it checked. It is as simple as having a blood pressure cup put on your arm. Thirdly, if you are over the age of 65, because of the President's Medicare bill, you are going to receive more help to get the prescription drugs you need if you need them to help save your life. Are you positively sure you don't have high blood pressure?

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I have some remarks I wish to make. I know Senator DORGAN has an important meeting at 10. I will withhold my comments so that he may be recognized first.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

The Senator from North Dakota.

CREATION OF JOBS WITH S. 1072

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague, Senator DASCHLE. I say to Senator FRIST, blood pressures rise from time to time actually on the floor of the Senate, depending on what we are doing. Mine relates to the issue of when we treat serious things too lightly or light things too seriously.

Speaking of that, most of us agree that a serious matter that ought to be treated seriously is the highway bill. This week was a disappointment because we had the difficulty of getting into our office buildings and the ricin issue here on Capitol Hill.

I know both the Republican leader and the Democratic leader share this view. This highway bill is critically important.

I recall a political campaign in an election that was waged a couple of campaigns ago where they had a sign on the wall that said, "It is the economy, stupid." That was their sign, just to remind them every day to focus like a laser on the economy.

With respect to this country's economy and jobs, at a time when more than 2½ million people lost their jobs in recent years and 8 to 10 million people are now looking for a job this morning, there isn't anything that we can do that is, in my judgment, more urgent than passing this highway bill. Why? Because this is a job generator. Instantly, people go back to work.

It means that contractors are out there with new contracts. They are hiring people. Everyone in this Chamber knows that the one formula for producing jobs now, immediately, is to pass this highway bill.

It has been a disappointment to me this week that we have had some—

was described in the National Journal or Congressional Quarterly as a small group of Republicans—who have decided to hold this bill up and stop it. That would not be in this country's interest.

We must get this done. I appreciate the strength of the majority leader and the strength of the Democratic leader, as well, to stay with it. I would say to Senator FRIST that I believe there is a broad, bipartisan consensus in this Chamber to produce a highway bill that helps us invest in the improvements necessary in roads and bridges across the country. Over 30 percent of them are in disrepair. But more important than that, in my judgment, is the ability to be a job generator, to expand this economy and put people back to work is job one.

There is not much more of importance we can do this year. I don't know of a more important bill this year that will be related to American jobs than this bill. So it is my hope that, even though there is some obstruction going on by a few in the Chamber on the other side, we stay here, stick with it, work late if necessary, and get this bill done. It is that important for this country. Frankly, I think there is a broad, bipartisan consensus on that point. When we have that, let's stick with it and do it, even if there are some in this Chamber who have decided they want to hold it up.

I thank my colleague from South Dakota, Senator DASCHLE, for giving me the time. I am about to go chair a hearing. It also relates to jobs. This jobs issue is so critically important. People got out of bed this morning in this country asking themselves: Where can I find a job? There are millions and millions of them. It is a big deal, a big issue. It is a serious matter for this country.

The bill we are considering now has the opportunity to allow us to address this in a very significant way, and we cannot and should not miss this opportunity.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader.

JOB CREATION

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from North Dakota for his comments this morning. I share his view about the importance of this highway bill, in particular.

I wish to say a few things about both the highway bill as well as the budget this morning. We just received our report again this month about the economy and the jobs created. I think the good news is that we did see the creation of 112,000 new jobs in January. I think that is a positive development. The bad news is that it falls short of what was needed to keep us on a path to ensure that jobs are not lost during the President's first term.

Mr. President, 150,000 new jobs in January was the stated goal of the Ad-

ministration. The figure released today indicates a substantial shortfall; this is nearly 40,000 jobs short of their stated goal. Of course, it is dramatically short—two-thirds short—of what the goal would be to reverse this unemployment debacle we have witnessed for the last 3 years. 300,000 new private sector jobs would have to be created each month to erase the decline we have witnessed the past 36 months. So while we made some progress this month with 112,000 new jobs, we are falling far short of the Administration's stated goal of 150,000 and even further short of the 300,000 jobs necessary to reverse the unfortunate trend.

There is another disturbing problem that we have not been able to address, and the administration has not been able to address. This is the 42nd month in a row that we have actually seen a loss of manufacturing jobs. For 42 straight months manufacturing jobs have declined.

The jobs issue may be the single most critical issue as we look at the economy. There is a long, long way to go before we can say with any confidence that we have turned this economy around, that people who have jobs will keep them, and people who don't have jobs will get them.

I think most of us would receive today's news about jobs this month with that sense of disappointment, but also with the realization that 112,000 jobs is better than what we had in December when only a thousand jobs were added.

THE TRANSPORTATION BILL

Let me take a moment to talk about the transportation bill again this morning. I will not repeat my concerns about the delay and resulting loss of those jobs. I want to focus on the positive and, once again, compliment the managers of the bill who balanced divergent interests to bring us a finely crafted bill that certainly deserves our support. Chairman INHOFE and Senator JEFFORDS, Senator BOND and Senator REID deserve our praise for working in a bipartisan fashion, as do Banking Committee Chairman SHELBY and Senator SARBANES, and Finance Committee Chairman GRASSLEY and Senator BAUCUS. But I also especially thank the majority leader for scheduling the time it will take to get this bill done. When the leader and I met on Monday, I was impressed with his resolve and desire to bear down and get this critical work done for this country.

Our roads, our bridges, our transit system, our rail lines, and our ports all need assistance to ensure that our Nation has the first-class infrastructure needed to reinvigorate our economy and make our country strong and competitive. After having lost 3 million jobs over the last 3 years, there is nothing more important than passing this bill, which will provide hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Senator FRIST and Senator INHOFE suggested the other day that it might