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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. 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.

O God, our Father, You alone can strengthen us to do Your will. Strengthen us to trust You when life brings more shadows than sunshine. Strengthen us to have faith, faith in You, even when doubts assail. Strengthen us with hope when things seem at their worst.

Strengthen the Members of this body with a reliance upon Your loving and powerful providence. Remind each Senator that all things work together for the good of those who love You. Strengthen us all to fight the good fight, to run a noble race, and to refuse to give in to despair.

We pray in Your strong 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, today, at 3 o'clock, we will begin consideration of the Transportation, Treasury, and HUD

appropriations bill. We expect amendments to be offered during today's session and, as I announced prior to the recess, the first vote will occur at 5:30. We expect that vote to be in relation to an amendment to the Transportation-Treasury bill, and we will coordinate with the two managers once we begin debate on the bill itself.

We are now in the final weeks of the first session. Members should expect busy weeks with rollcall votes possible each day of the week, including Fridays. I say including on Fridays not as a threat but as a reality of the large amount of work remaining that we have to do and the time left for completing our business.

I do thank all Senators in advance for their patience and cooperation as we try to wrap up our business next month.

SENATE AGENDA

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I welcome back our colleagues from the Columbus Day recess. As we open our session, I hope everyone—I am sure they did—had a productive and rejuvenating week with their constituents and their families and their friends. We have a very busy 5-week session ahead of us. There is a lot of work to do.

First up is going to be spending reconciliation. This week our committees are taking up the hard work of thoughtfully considering spending cuts to ensure fiscal discipline, particularly in light of our responsibilities in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. It is not an easy job. It is not going to be an easy job over the next several days and weeks. I do want to thank our committees and their chairmen and ranking members for their determination and focus.

On appropriations, we have made steady progress. We have made good progress in the last several weeks. I anticipate we will be able to finish the Transportation, Treasury, HUD, and

DC appropriations bill this week, which means once we are successful with that—and we will be—we will have only one bill remaining. I thank, particularly, Chairman THAD COCHRAN for his tremendous leadership in this appropriations process.

The appropriations process is one of our primary responsibilities. It funds the basic functions of our Government. And we are committed to doing so in a way that is disciplined and is fiscally responsible.

This is equally true as we continue to meet the challenges of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. In the wake of these twin disasters, we focused on providing the targeted relief, the immediate relief, and the effective tax incentives that we know will work to help the gulf coast recover and rebuild.

As this process moves forward, we are going to face a lot of tough decisions, a lot of difficult decisions. But with each of these decisions does come an opportunity, an opportunity to encourage growth, to lower costs, to create jobs, and to strengthen the economy as the gulf recovers and rebuilds stronger and, indeed, more prosperous than ever.

Throughout, we need to keep a sharp eye on the bottom line, and we need to set clear priorities. Some have called for higher taxes to cover the short-term expense. I disagree. America's families are already bearing the burden of higher taxes in higher gasoline prices and heating bills as a result of the storms. We cannot and should not burden the American people with even greater Government-imposed expenses.

We need to stick to a rigorous program of fiscal discipline and strong progrowth and deliver meaningful solutions that are responsible and effective, that we know will work.

Before the Columbus Day recess, I asked our committee chairmen to keep working on the spending controls we agreed to earlier this year and to look for ways to find additional savings.

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



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I asked our Budget Committee chairman, JUDD GREGG, to put together feasible and achievable savings recommendations. I also asked him to coordinate his work with the House and the White House.

We have also endorsed the concept of creating an independent inspector general to make sure the Katrina and Rita disaster relief will be well spent.

To further control costs, we have asked the President to send the Congress a rescissions package under the Budget Act. This is the only guaranteed way to ensure both the House and Senate jointly take a stand on spending. This authority, last used in 1992, resulted in savings, then, of nearly \$8 billion.

We are moving forward, and I urge all of our colleagues to continue to work together to impose aggressive fiscal discipline to restrain Government spending.

In the next 5 weeks, we will also consider the President's nomination of Harriet Miers to the Supreme Court of the United States. I expect the Senate to carry out its constitutional advice and consent responsibility in an expeditious, fair, and civil manner, as we did with Chief Justice John Roberts.

Harriet Miers is an accomplished and experienced lawyer, who is respected by her peers and trusted by the President. In the weeks ahead, we will have the opportunity to learn more about her background and more about her qualifications. Through courtesy calls and hearings, we will have that opportunity to hear from Ms. Miers herself.

I urge all of my colleagues to let her be heard and to resist a rush to judgment. Such as with all judicial nominees, Harriet Miers deserves a fair up-or-down vote.

In the meantime, we will continue to work for consent on pensions and Defense authorization. I urge my colleagues to work together to get these critical pieces of legislation done.

Protecting our fellow citizens' safety and well-being is our highest obligation. The American people expect and deserve a Senate that is purpose driven and that does get results. We are called upon to govern with meaningful solutions.

In this session, we have worked hard to address some daunting challenges: defeating our terrorist enemies, tackling rising energy costs, and securing our borders from illegal immigration and terrorist threat. More remains to be done. We face a serious threat of avian flu, as well as taking a hard look at our spending priorities.

These are just two examples. There will be many more. But I am confident that by pulling together with a sense of common purpose we can secure a stronger, safer, healthier, freer, and more prosperous America. I am confident that with determination and focus we will continue to move America forward.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

PRIORITIES OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, similar to all Senators, with rare exception, I spent last week's recess at home. I traveled Nevada meeting with my constituents. I met with a wide range of people. I had many conversations. But all the conversations came back to the same issues, including rising energy prices.

One of the last conversations I had was at my home in Searchlight, where some of our friends who live in Searchlight came to visit with us, Judy and Dick Hill. He works at a powerplant, the Mojave Generating Facility, about 35 miles from Las Vegas. She is the assistant postmistress of Searchlight. They have two boys. One of them is going to school. She is even taking some courses at a community college.

They spend about \$500 a month on gasoline. Maybe they should get vehicles that do not use as much gas, and I am sure they are considering that, but it would not matter what kind of vehicle they drove; they need lots of gasoline to be able to do what they have to do, such as going back and forth to work, taking the boy to school.

People in Nevada are concerned about Iraq, as well they should be. I certainly applaud the people of Iraq. A little more than half of them turned out to vote. That is courageous. They are proud people, and I am glad they have shown their strength by turning out to vote. And it appears the constitution is going to pass. We will know in a few days.

We lost five soldiers yesterday in Iraq. We are very quickly approaching 2,000. We have not quite arrived at that number yet, but we are 10 or 12 short of that number.

The costs are ongoing. The war seems to be intractable. Surprisingly, the administration is still claiming, as Secretary Rice did over the weekend on a Sunday talk show, that the war is a result of 9/11. The American people do not accept that because it is simply not true.

Of course, constituents were concerned about Katrina and, of course, whether we are ready for another disaster such as the avian flu. I am sure this is not unique. I am sure other Senators had the same experiences I did these past 10 days. Americans from all walks of life are focused on these important issues, and they are looking to us for help. As the Democratic leader, I felt comfortable assuring my constituents that my Democratic colleagues are doing everything we can to meet these three areas about which they spoke.

On Iraq, we continue to press the President to answer key questions

about how he is going to change course and achieve military and political success and to get an accounting of how the money has been spent.

On energy, we believe we must remain committed—and we will remain committed—to energy independence by the year 2020. And we have pushed to help families fill their tanks and heat their homes.

With Katrina, we have continued to fight to make sure the needs of displaced families are placed at the top of the Senate's agenda.

And with the avian flu, we have taken the lead in offering solutions to help prepare America and Americans for the next possible disaster.

You see, Democrats understand these issues are the priorities of the American people. That is why they are priorities for us.

Mr. President, a couple of comments regarding the statement of my friend, the Republican leader. I do not know of anyone who is calling for higher taxes, as he suggests. But I know there are people calling for doing away with the budget resolution and reconciliation that calls for \$70 billion more in tax cuts—\$70 billion more in tax cuts—that go to the elite of the country.

On top of that, I would suggest that we need to, in effect, get rid of the reconciliation.

The resolution that will be executed by the reconciliation process now before the Congress, that was called by all leaders of Protestant Churches the night we voted on it immoral, is even more so now, the resolution before us, not counting what the House says they are going to do. They are going to cut more, Medicaid by \$10 billion, cut Medicaid more, cut medical care to the poorest of the poor in America. They want to increase it by another \$5 or \$10 billion. That is unconscionable.

My distinguished friend, the majority leader, said the high energy costs are a result of the storm of Katrina. That is simply without fact. Prior to Katrina, oil prices were at \$70 a barrel. This is a problem that has been going on for a while. We Democrats are concerned about the priorities of the American people. I suggest that those issues about which my friend spoke are not priorities, certainly not to the people of Nevada. We are focused on addressing America's pressing needs. Republicans are acting as though nothing is wrong, that the storm caused the problems.

Take energy. The price of gas continues to hover around \$3. I already told you about Dick and Judy Hill in Searchlight. Millions of other people are in the same boat as Dick and Judy. The administration's own Energy Department predicts families will pay hundreds more to heat their homes this winter.

I met with Governor Doyle of Wisconsin today. He said in Wisconsin to heat your home will cost \$300 a month more. Despite these facts, Republicans have refused to help families at the