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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's prayer will be offered by our guest Chaplain, Dr. Stephen L. Swisher, Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer.

Let us pray.

We pray, Dear God, that You would fill this sacred minute with meaning and make it an oasis for the refreshment of our souls, a window cleaning for our vision, and a recharging of the batteries of our spirit. As this day unfolds, give us the courage to step into life with new drive and motivation.

As we gather here in this historic place, facing the stress of committee hearings, paperwork deadlines, and seemingly endless functions, may we not lose sight of our true purpose—to get the right things done and in some cases the wrong things undone.

I pray Your blessings upon each Member of this our United States Senate, their families and staff members. Surround each one with Your protection, strength, and guidance. May they feel You as close as their next breath.

Lord, we remember those who have stood here before us and we are proud—and in our minds we can visualize the sea of faces whom we represent, those multiplied millions of people looking to us to make a real, positive, significant difference—and we are emboldened. May our words offer hope and our actions inspiration. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CRAIG THOMAS led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Repub-

lic 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, March 2, 2006.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CRAIG THOMAS, a Senator from the State of Wyoming, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning we have 30 minutes set aside for a period of morning business. Following that 30 minutes, we will resume postcloture debate on the PATRIOT Act conference report. We had five procedural votes on or in relation to the PATRIOT Act yesterday, concluding with an 84-to-15 vote. Given that overwhelming vote, it is now time for the Senate to take a final vote on this con-

ference report. That vote is scheduled for 3 p.m. today. We will divide the time equally until that time.

After the vote on the adoption of the PATRIOT Act, we will proceed to a cloture vote on the issue of LIHEAP. I hope we can proceed to the LIHEAP bill and come to a resolution on that measure before the close of the week. In any event, I am confident we will proceed to that measure and work toward a vote on the LIHEAP issue. We will update Senators this afternoon after the two votes later today.

COMBAT METH ACT

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I wish to make a brief comment on an important provision on methamphetamine that is in the PATRIOT Act but not a lot of attention has been focused on it over the last several days, a very important provision.

At 3 o'clock today the Senate will vote on passage of the PATRIOT Act conference report, and after a lot of months of debate we will finally deliver a PATRIOT Act that is stronger and tougher and more effective against terrorists on American soil, while at the same time protecting our civil liberties.

It has not been easy. It has taken a long time. But now we are on the verge of a tremendous success with the passage of a very important bill that will benefit the American people.

The Combat Meth Act is legislation Senator TALENT introduced last year, and I and many of our colleagues are a cosponsor of that legislation. Senator TALENT's leadership has been instrumental in pushing this bill forward, and it is something of which we can all be very proud.

I have worked with the House leadership to encourage Members to get this done because meth is a crisis that has been building in all of our States. It is highly addictive, cheap, and easily available.

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



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In the last 10 years meth has become America's worst drug problem. I say that, even putting it before marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, in that the use of it has increased so significantly and it is so terribly addictive.

Last year Tennessee ranked No. 2, tied with Iowa and just behind Missouri, in the number of meth lab seizures. Through tougher laws and tougher enforcement over the last year and a half Tennessee is starting to see a turnaround, and that is one of the reasons I am so convinced this legislation will have a dramatic impact in a short period of time.

It was in March of last year that Tennessee signed its Meth Free Tennessee Act, a much needed law that required retailers to take cold medicines and sinus medicines containing pseudoephedrine off the shelves and put them behind the counter where they can be closely monitored. As a result of this powerful new approach, lab seizures have declined dramatically, down 40 percent in May and another 60 percent in June.

In addition, district attorneys across the State have told me of the tremendous impact it has made and they joined Governor Bresden in launching the Meth Destroys campaign. Through videos and brochures and bulletin boards and other means of public relations, the Meth Destroys campaign is reaching out to schools, to church groups, to parents, to civic organizations, to educate the public on the grave dangers of this highly addictive drug, methamphetamine.

Now with the imminent passage of the Combat Meth Act here in the Senate today at 3 o'clock, everyone's job is going to get a whole lot easier.

We learned that when one State restricted access to the precursors, meth cooks simply crossed over to the adjoining State, bought their ingredients and brought them back. Law enforcement told us again and again that they needed uniform law to be able to cut off this access to and purchase of these ingredients.

Senator TALENT and Senator FEINSTEIN introduced the Combat Meth Act to restrict access to cold medicines containing pseudoephedrine and ephedrine across all 50 States. Under the Combat Meth Act, meth users will no longer be able to jump from State to State, cruise from State to State in order to buy these ingredients.

Once again I thank Senator TALENT and Senator FEINSTEIN for pushing hard to get this done. It will have a direct impact in a short period of time. Lives will be saved, communities will be better protected because of their commitment. I urge all of our colleagues to vote for the PATRIOT Act, which includes the Combat Meth Act, this afternoon. It applies directly to the well-being and safety of our neighbors and fellow citizens.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before the distinguished majority leader leaves, will the Senator be so kind as to allow 5 more minutes in morning business on each side, with 20 minutes on each side. We have a number of people seeking recognition.

Mr. FRIST. That will be fine.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 40 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader and the second half of the time under the control of the majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I yield 10 minutes to Senator BAUCUS of Montana and 10 minutes to Senator KENT CONRAD of North Dakota, in that order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. BAUCUS. I thank the Chair. I thank the leader very much for the allocation of time.

INCREASING THE FEDERAL DEBT LIMIT

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, on December 29 of last year I received a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury, John Snow, asking that Congress increase the Federal deficit. This is extremely important, obviously; that is, whether we should and the degree to which we should increase the Federal debt limit. But we don't have any scheduled debate on this and I don't think, frankly, the leadership wants to schedule debate on whether we should and the degree to which we should increase the Federal debt. I think the reason is pretty clear. It is because it is embarrassing. It is an embarrassment that our Federal debt is growing so much and at a rapid rate.

I say that in part because the Secretary says the United States will hit the limit in the middle of this month. That is not too many days away. I hope very much this body exercises its responsibility to do what it should do and let's have a discussion on our fiscal situation: How great is the debt? What should be done about it? How big is the deficit and what should be done about that? Where are we? Where are we headed? What are the implications?

These are very real questions that affect the financial security of the United States and which affect very

greatly individual Americans. I very much hope we have that debate of the points I think we should consider. It is our responsibility to address the implications of our huge Federal debt and deficits. We have a responsibility to do that. That is our job. It is much more our job to address that than it is some other things I think we do here in the Senate, and I am going to do what I can to urge my colleagues and urge, frankly, anybody listening and watching to begin to think about what is going on here because this is critical.

Let's review some of the facts about the debt limit. Currently, our Treasury, the U.S. Treasury, is authorized to issue debt totaling over \$8 trillion. That is the current statute. Last year's budget resolution proposed an increase in that authorization of \$781 billion. That is an increase. That would be the fourth largest debt limit increase in the Nation's history.

If I might briefly indicate in a graphic way literally what that means. This basically is a chart showing the amount of Federal debt limit increases the Congress has enacted over various years going back not too long ago—1986 up to the present.

The red bars here indicate the amount of the debt increase Congress has enacted because our Federal debt was going up so quickly. You can see there was a big increase back in 1990. That was the time when, frankly, our country was under a little bit of pressure and the debt was going up. Between 2000, 2001, we did not have any debt increases. But what has happened lately?

You can see all these huge increases in the last 4 years. In 2002, the Congress increased the national debt by \$450 billion.

Here is a whopper. In 2003, Congress increased the Federal debt by close to \$1 trillion. The next year it increased the Federal debt by \$800 billion, four-fifths of a trillion dollars in 1 year. Last year it did not have to increase the debt because the \$800 billion carried us over through 2005, but here again we have to increase the Federal debt by \$781 billion.

The debate point is that in the last years there have been big increases in the Federal debt. Why? Because we have been borrowing so much in this country, Congress has authorized and the President has proposed very large expenses.

More striking, though, is that total increase has occurred since the year 2002.

During this administration, America's debt, the total deficit, has increased by \$3 trillion. You can imagine. Since 2002, if you add up all the increases in the Federal debt, our Federal debt has increased by \$3 trillion. That is not the level now; it is close to \$9 trillion if it is increased further. But this is the increase—and those increases have occurred only in the last 4 years. That is a 40-percent increase in the entire Federal debt accrued by our