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Senate

The Senate met at 1 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JEFF SESSIONS, a Senator from the State of Alabama.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

You have given us much, O God, not because You love us more than others but because You have entrusted us with a stewardship. Help us to faithfully use our gifts to bless others.

As Senators today do the work of freedom, may they invest their talents in uniting our Nation and world. Guide them toward those opportunities that will destroy barriers and remove walls. As they work to bring harmony from discord, may they live lives that lead to peace.

Lord, warm all our hearts with Your love. Enlighten our minds with Your truth, and fill our lives with Your power that we may live for You. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JEFF SESSIONS 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, March 6, 2006.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable JEFF SESSIONS, a Senator from the State of Alabama, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, today, following my remarks and the remarks of the Democratic leader, we will start a period of morning business. We are expecting that around 2 o'clock today we will begin consideration of the lobbying reform bill. The two bills were reported last week—one by the Rules Committee and the other by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. We will proceed to the Rules Committee bill and offer a substitute amendment which is a combination of these pieces of legislation. I hope Senators will take advantage of the opportunity today to come down and give statements on lobbying reform.

This afternoon at 5:30 we have three votes on three district court judges. I am not certain we will need a rollcall vote on each of these. But at this point Senators should anticipate up to three rollcall votes at 5:30.

I should remind our colleagues that we have a cloture motion filed on LIHEAP, which was introduced by Senator SNOWE. That cloture vote will occur tomorrow morning. I hope cloture will be invoked and we can complete that bill as quickly as possible and then return to the consideration of the lobbying reform legislation.

We will have votes over the course of the week. I anticipate it is going to be

a busy week, requiring a lot of work on the lobbying reform, on LIHEAP, and other issues that come forward. There are 2 weeks remaining before our next recess. Another issue we will be dealing with in committee this week is the budget. We will be dealing with that before we leave, and issues such as the debt ceiling as well will be dealt with before we leave—a whole range of issues. It will be a busy week as we go forward.

Let me turn to the Democratic leader—I have a brief statement on lobbying reform—if there are any thoughts or questions or comments about scheduling or issues.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we believe it will not be necessary to have a vote on the Puerto Rican judge. We will be able to do that by voice vote. There will be two votes. I am wondering if the leader has an indication as to tomorrow. What will happen after the cloture vote? Do we know yet?

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, we do not know yet. We will have some idea by later today. But I hope cloture will be invoked and that we can complete it as rapidly as possible.

LEGISLATIVE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, today the Senate is taking another step forward to make our Government more transparent and more accountable. It will be a very important debate on very substantive issues, issues that affect the operation of this body and our relationships to outside groups.

We will begin debate on the comprehensive lobbying and ethics reform legislation. Over the last few months, we have made steady progress.

The Senate was first to develop a plan. It was the first to establish a working group to examine the issue. It was the first to hold committee hearings and to have a markup—two markups. And today we will be the first to

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



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bring a comprehensive lobbying reform package to the floor.

I wish to in particular thank our colleague from Pennsylvania, Senator SANTORUM, for his willingness to lead a lobbying reform working group. He has hosted numerous meetings over the last several weeks and spent countless hours on this issue. We are where we are today in large part because of his commitment and his leadership. I wish to recognize him for that.

I also appreciate the work of the chairman and chairwoman of our Rules Committee and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Chairman LOTT and Chairman COLLINS. They have worked expeditiously, both in discussions and holding hearings and markups, so we could in response to my request have available for floor consideration today legislation that centers on commonsense reform. There will be a lot of debate and there will be a lot of discussion, but I think the issues have been laid out and laid out well. Those two chairmen will be co-managing the bill from our side of the aisle, since each of those committees brought forth that legislation from their respective committees.

So that everyone understands how we expect to proceed, we will begin debate on S. 2349, the Legislative Transparency and Accountability Act. The first amendment offered will be a substitute, incorporating the joint text of both the bills reported by the Rules Committee and by the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

I have asked the two managers to move forward in as efficient a way as we possibly can in order to achieve that goal of completing this legislation this week. It is going to take a lot of hard work, a lot of working together, and a lot of cooperation in order to accomplish that. Chairman LOTT and Chairman COLLINS are committed to this timeframe. I encourage all of our colleagues to work with them to ensure that we can accomplish this goal.

If Senators have amendments—and I recognize there will be a number of amendments—I urge them to discuss those amendments, the nature of those amendments, and make the language available as soon as possible with the managers. Let us keep amendments on the issue that is at hand, the issues surrounding ethics and lobbying. Tying up the bill with unrelated amendments, which we call nongermane amendments, is not in anybody's best interest. So let us stay on the bill as much as we possibly can.

A final note. As we enter the debate—I think we will enter it—we are entering it in a tone of working together. It is not a partisan issue we are addressing. People expect us to work together to develop meaningful, non-partisan solutions but bipartisan solutions to the real problems we know we will be addressing. Ethics is not a partisan issue. The rules apply, as they should, to every Senator and every

staff member, regardless of party or stripe. No one gets a special exception.

That is the spirit in which we should approach this bill.

The rules we operate under are bipartisan. The reforms indeed are and should be bipartisan as well. It is my firm belief that as public servants we are obligated to protect the integrity of this fantastic, magnificent institution, and most importantly to represent the genuine interests of the voters—which is our responsibility—who sent us here.

It is time for us to reexamine the rules so that bad apples are exposed before they spoil the whole lot. That is why I have brought this bill to the floor now so we can address it right up front early on in this session. Taking these steps will go a long way to lifting the cloud that threatens to obscure all of our other efforts to offer meaningful reforms and solutions to the problems we now face and that face all Americans.

The issue is something very personal to me. I still consider myself a citizen legislator, coming here for a period of time and going back home. It causes me to reflect on my first vote as a Senator. It was on the Congressional Accountability Act, an act that ensures that Congress abides by the laws it passes.

I believe deeply that we serve the people—not the other way around, and that spirit will be the spirit I believe we will all put forth in this debate over the next several days.

We have a real opportunity before us—an opportunity to make government more transparent, more accountable, and to strengthen the American people's confidence in our body. Once again, I ask my colleagues to join together and deliver meaningful reforms, not only to fulfill our commitment to the American people but to protect and preserve the honor of this great institution we all have the privilege of serving.

I yield the floor.

HONEST LEADERSHIP AND OPEN GOVERNMENT ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in recent months, the public has been shocked and outraged over stories dealing with abusive and, I believe, criminal practices—and so do various prosecutors—by lobbyists, senior administration officials, Members of Congress, and even congressional staff. A number of these participants in these schemes that breached the public trust have pled guilty—Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff, former staffer for the recent House Republican Majority Leader Michael Scanlon, Republican Member of Congress Duke Cunningham, and one of his coconspirators, Michael Wade. Others are under indictment, including President Bush's political appointee David Safavian.

The guilty pleas, indictments, and documents released to date suggest

wrongdoing or improper behavior by many others, including a former Deputy Secretary of the Interior, other former aides to the recent House Republican majority leader, former aides to Republican Senators; Grover Norquist, a close ally of the Bush White House; Ralph Reed, long-time political operative for the Republicans—in fact, he has been State chair of at least one State party—and, of course, the heads of two other groups closely associated with the Republican Party.

The American people understand these are not one or two isolated incidents. They understand this is a clear pattern of wrongdoing—wrongdoing that can only be explained by an alarming sense of impunity. The public understands these individuals felt that they were above the law. They felt they could ignore the rules. They felt government was not there to serve the people's interest but to serve their own special interests or the interests of some of their cronies.

The public has seen a Republican culture that has distorted government priority and grown into the greatest government scandal since Watergate. So as we begin this debate, it is important to realize this wrongdoing often violated existing laws and congressional ethics rules. It is already illegal to offer or accept a bribe. It is already illegal to defraud your clients. It is already illegal to lie and commit perjury. The rules already prohibit Members from taking trips that have no real business purpose and are just excuses for a golf outing. So much of what went on was already criminal or certainly clearly unethical. The problem, in many cases, was not in the rules. It was in the culture that allowed everyone to believe they could ignore the rules.

But in some cases it was clear, the rules have shortcomings. So even though a number of the things that people did clearly violated the rules we now have, in some of these cases it was clear that the rules had shortcomings and we needed to beef them up. In these areas, we need to expand disclosure and tighten rules that have been abused. We also need to find a way to restore public faith in the integrity of our Federal Government.

The best way to do this is to show the public we take this issue seriously and that we will act aggressively and swiftly to change the culture in the Nation's Capital.

That is why I am satisfied with what my Democratic colleagues have been able to do with this legislation that will shortly be before the Senate. As soon as we returned from the winter recess, we, as a caucus, acted decisively. We unveiled sweeping reform principles and backed them with legislation. It is one thing to address this issue through quickly called press conferences that offer no details; it is another to put reform to paper and to use a reform bill that has supported virtually the entire