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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable SAM BROWBACK, a Senator from the State of Kansas.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Our Father, the architect of the universe, in spite of our doubts and fears, we come to You. We lean upon Your might because You sustain us through the seasons.

As our lawmakers face today's challenges, guide them with Your providence. Strengthen them to persevere toward their goals, knowing that a bountiful harvest is certain if they endure to the end. May their works make a difference for Your kingdom.

Again, we pray for our military men and women. Give them wisdom and courage and protect them from harm.

We pray in the Name of Emmanuel. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable SAM BROWBACK 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 as follows:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 28, 2006.

To the Senate:

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

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. BROWBACK 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, we have set aside the first 2 hours of the session for a period of morning business. The first hour is under the control of the minority, and the second hour is under the control of the majority.

At the conclusion of morning business or shortly thereafter, we hope to turn to the Oman free-trade agreement. The Finance Committee is meeting this morning and expects to report out that measure. It is privileged and will be considered under the 20-hour statutory time limit. I don't expect that we will need all of the time, but some debate will be required. Senators can, therefore, expect a vote later today once we reach an understanding as to the time required on that bill.

This week, we will also consider the Paulson nomination to be Secretary of the Treasury, and we may also clear an appropriations bill for action.

Having said that, we will alert all Members as to the timing of the votes as we reach agreements on any of the legislative and executive items I just mentioned.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there

will now be a period for the transaction of morning business, with the first hour under the control of the minority and the second hour under the control of the majority.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I will use my leader time so the time will not go against the Democratic morning business time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada is recognized under his leader time.

VOTING RIGHTS ACT REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as you know, outside these doors to my left is a beautiful room called the President's Room, or the Red Room. We call it the President's Room because for many decades, this was the place where Presidents came to sign legislation. During the past century, the 20th century, it wasn't used often at all. Rarely was it used for Presidents to come and sign legislation. But on August 6, 1965, it was used. The last time the Red Room, or the President's Room, was used for signing a bill into law was on a hot summer day of 1965. It had been a very hot summer. The purpose of President Lyndon Johnson coming to the Capitol to sign the bill here, rather than in the White House, was because it was the Voting Rights Act. The reason I say it was a very hot summer, it had been a hot couple of years.

I would direct everyone's attention to a wonderful book written by Taylor Branch, a relatively new book, published recently, called "At Canaan's Edge." This book tells the story of a number of things, but one is how the Voting Rights Act became law. People

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



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sacrificed their lives to allow this movement to go forward and, ultimately, to have this legislation passed.

So if we look back historically, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 is one of the most magnificent pieces of legislation ever passed by Congress because what it did is jump forward 100 years following the Civil War and give African Americans the ability to register to vote. Counties and various States in the South that were basically all African American had no African-American voters. The Voting Rights Act changed that. And now African Americans all over this country, but especially in the South, have had their lives changed by not having to feel the crash of a baseball bat on their head like Reverend Reeb, who came to peacefully demonstrate to allow people to have the right to vote and was killed with the smash of a baseball bat on the side of his head. Lives were lost, I repeat, and many people were injured. Many were seriously injured in an attempt to exercise the basic right of voting in America.

Why do I bring this to the Senate's attention today? The reason I bring it to the Senate's attention today is, it was a short time ago, early May, and it was very hot in Washington, and we went to the east front on the House side to have a press conference. There were dozens of Members of Congress there. Cameras were there, and people were shoving for position so the camera could see them. Everybody was there to talk about the need to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. The press event took a long time. We had a number of speakers there, and they all talked about how important it was that we reauthorize the Voting Rights Act. I was there, Senator FRIST was there, House leaders were there, chairman and ranking members of the Judiciary Committees were there, civil rights leaders were there to announce their support for the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. We stood together that day on the steps of the Capitol and announced a bipartisan, bicameral introduction of that bill.

I thought that day held great promise for the Congress and the Nation. The old days of the early 1960s were put behind us, and this would just go through here very quickly. I thought the legislation would be reauthorized and we would move down the road. I thought it showed great possibilities that leaders of both parties recognized that protecting the right to vote is not a partisan issue, it is an American issue and one we would join to support without qualification.

While finding common ground seems increasingly beyond our reach on many debates in the Senate, our joint support for the Voting Rights Act stood as a sign that we could still readily stand together to protect the rights upon which this Nation was founded.

In the weeks that followed, some progress was made in moving the bill forward in the House and the Senate.

In both Chambers, an exhaustive record was built, demonstrating without question the continued need for the Voting Rights Act protections.

I am sorry to report that progress has stalled. It has really stalled. Last week, House leaders failed to follow through on their commitment to move this reauthorization in that body. It is now not clear when or even if the House will act. We urge them to do so quickly. But the fact that the House hasn't acted doesn't mean we cannot act in the Senate. The commitment we all made in May on the east front of the Capitol is a commitment that the American people are going to hold us to. As I have said, we need not wait for the House. I am told the Senate Judiciary Committee is going to complete a markup of this important legislation in July. I hope so. As we know, the original timetable was May.

Mr. President, I stand ready to work with my friend, the distinguished majority leader, to move this matter forward in the Senate, and let the House do what they feel they need to do. We need to have the Judiciary Committee complete its work, bring this to the Senate floor in July, and spend time on it, talking about how important this legislation has been and how that President's Room back there could be used by President Bush to come and sign the reauthorization of this bill. Hopefully he can do it this summer.

I don't stand alone in the pursuit of passing the reauthorization of the Voting Rights Act. More than 40 Democratic and Republican Senators have signed as cosponsors of this legislation. I really believe that together we can fulfill the commitment we made in May to support the voting rights of all Americans, without equivocation, by calling this bill up in July and moving forward with its swift passage.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

CHECKLIST FOR CHANGE

Mrs. CLINTON. Mr. President, last week, the Democratic women of the Senate, led by our dean, Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI, held an event at the Sewall Belmont House, which I am very proud to say put forth what we are calling the checklist for change. We came together around the importance of an agenda in Congress that meets the needs of all of the American people.

We have been given an hour this morning to discuss these issues. Our first speaker, our leader, is the Senator from Maryland, who has paved the way

for women not only in the Senate but in our country on so many issues. I am, with great pride, yielding to the Senator from Maryland.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New York, as well as all of my colleagues, the nine Democratic women from the U.S. Senate.

We are united today. We, the Democratic women of the Senate, rise in a united way to launch something we are calling the Democratic Women for Change. We want to change the agenda that is going through the Senate. We want to change the tone in the Senate for one of more civility, and we want to change the schedule to get things done.

The Senate has only been in session about 75 days, less time than most State legislatures. And what have we debated? Divisive constitutional amendments and tax breaks for zillionaires.

I regret that the Republican leadership has squandered time, squandered opportunity, and squandered taxpayers' money. We spent time with bills focused on reelecting Republicans instead of helping American families. It is time we bring real issues to the floor. We have only 50 days left before this Senate adjourns. This is why we have done our checklist.

We have a must-do list for change. It is specific, it is immediate, it is realizable, and it is also affordable.

We women know about checklists. We remember all the important things that we need to get done by having a checklist. It is what we use to keep our families on track, and now we bring a checklist to the Senate to get America on track.

These are the challenges that we can meet right now by the time Congress adjourns for the fall elections. Each and every one of us has a specific issue we want to see done, and we want to check that off.

I am advocating for reliable pensions. I want to talk about retirement security and giving help to those people who practice self-help all of their lives. In the United States of America, everyone should retire with financial security.

Honoring your father and your mother is not only a good commandment to live by, it is a very good policy by which to govern. That is why we the Democratic women of the Senate fought to stop the privatization of Social Security, and we were successful. Now we stand sentry on the Senate floor to make sure Social Security is never ever privatized.

We believe that Social Security should be a guaranteed benefit, not a guaranteed gamble. We want to make sure Social Security is reliable, undeniable, and inflation proof.

But as we stand sentry, we are alarmed to see that a budget bill will come soon to the Senate floor that