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Senate

The Senate met at 9:45 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable LAMAR ALEXANDER, a Senator from the State of Tennessee.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's prayer will be offered by the Chief of Staff to the Senate Chaplain, Alan N. Keiran.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray:

Lord God, King and Creator of the heavens and the Earth, we pause to offer our praise and thanksgiving for the joys of life. You have blessed us with friends and family, freedom and faith. You have given us religious liberty and have challenged us to seek Your eternal wisdom as we plot the course of our lives. You have blessed our Nation with praying leaders whose hearts are inclined toward You.

We ask Your blessing on all our Nation's leaders and citizens. Bless our President, our Representatives, our Senators, their families, and their staffs. May each experience a deep sense of Your love and mercy. Grant them good health, safe travel, and ample rest as they serve our great Nation.

Be with the members of our Armed Forces and their families. Grant those in harm's way the light of Your presence. Bless and protect all guardians of liberty at home and deployed. And bless all who are attending Mrs. Coretta Scott King's funeral today.

We pray in Your glorious Name.
Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable LAMAR ALEXANDER 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, February 7, 2006.

To the Senate:

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

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. ALEXANDER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 60 minutes. The first half of the time will be under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the second half of the time will be under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

RECOGNITION OF THE ASSISTANT MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. McCONNELL. As the occupant of the chair indicated, this morning, we will have a period of morning business

for up to 60 minutes, and that is equally divided.

Following that time, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 852, the asbestos bill. Yesterday, the majority leader filed cloture on the motion to proceed to the asbestos bill and that cloture vote is scheduled for 6 p.m. today.

We have a Senate delegation attending the funeral of Coretta Scott King in Georgia today. Tonight's vote at 6 will be the first vote of the day.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

I ask unanimous consent that debate on the motion to proceed be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees. I further ask that the last 20 minutes be allocated as follows: The Democratic leader or his designee for 10 minutes, to be followed by the majority leader or his designee for the final 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, it is our hope that we will be able to invoke cloture today and start debate on the substance of this very important piece of legislation. If cloture is invoked, I believe the chairman would be ready tonight or early tomorrow to begin work on the bill, and we can discuss the timing of that later in the day.

As the leader announced, we expect to be on the asbestos bill for the remainder of this week. We would like to make progress on asbestos-related amendments throughout this current week.

I also remind our colleagues that we will continue to work on executive nominations this week. There are a number of executive nominations on the calendar. They are ready for consideration and should be considered. Members should expect votes on those nominations as well.

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

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

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



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The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

IMPACT OF THE BUDGET PROCESS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, a week ago we all listened as the President laid out his priorities in the State of the Union.

At the time, I noted that what he says in his speech is a lot less important than what he does in his budget.

Yesterday, he sent us his budget, and I am deeply concerned about what it means for our country, our people and our future.

Later today, I will raise some of my concerns directly with the budget director, and I will come back here to the floor time and again to talk about what we should be doing.

But this morning, I want to step back and take a broad look at the significance of the budget and the choices before us.

I want to remind my colleagues that what we do now will affect us, and the American people, months from now.

The budget decisions we make now will either empower us, or tie our hands, when we turn to write the appropriations bills.

I am speaking on the floor today to warn my colleagues that you cannot vote for an unrealistic budget in the spring and then act surprised in the summer and fall when painful cuts are required.

At the end of every year, Congress crams several important pieces of legislation through in a rush to head home for the holidays. This past year was no different. In a matter of days, we finished appropriations bills, authorization bills, and even spending cuts.

Unfortunately, the logjam we experienced at the end of last year was not a surprise to many of us who work closely on the budget process.

Starting in March, many of us began raising concerns that we were headed in the wrong direction. We knew that there was no way we could honor our commitment to America's working families, enact huge cuts in entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid, enact another round of tax cuts, and continue to cut our Nation's deficit.

When you add in the growing cost of war and Hurricane Katrina, the legislative train wreck was entirely predictable.

But no matter what the hurry, make no mistake these bills have serious consequences, and their impact will be felt for years to come.

They set funding levels, cut and grow programs, and set important policy for agencies and programs touching nearly every American.

But it is more than that. Collectively, they represent our priorities and reflect our values.

They provide the direction we intend to lead the country. And what too few Americans know—and too few Senators seem to remember—is that one single document serves as the blueprint for these additions, subtractions and everything in between each year.

I'm speaking, of course, about the Federal budget resolution.

Every year, with much fanfare and even more detail, the administration sends Congress a spending and revenue plan for the next 5 years. Congress is required to draft a similar spending and revenue plan.

Our work begins on the day we receive the President's budget and is supposed to be completed by April 15. From early February, until April we debate, mark up, and offer a multitude of amendments.

Most of the time, we complete this process and move to the next phase of the budget process on May 1. The congressional budget resolution sets the tone for the entire budget process, including appropriations.

I have served on the Budget Committee for my entire Senate career. It's a very important committee, one that I take great pride in working on. But its work is not often considered newsworthy or particularly interested for the press and public.

While this process may not always draw front-page coverage, its importance could not be greater.

This one document is more than numbers and charts. From health care to energy, security to the economy, this one document is the vehicle that allows us to act on each and every priority the Government will have for an entire year.

The Federal budget is the statement of our priorities as a people. It should be a moral, thoughtful document.

It should carefully consider its impact on the Nation's best-off and worst-off.

Too often, I fear, this impact is overlooked in all the details and process. Its impact is lost in the time from the budget's passage to the enactment of the final appropriations bills.

That is why this year, with the benefit of our action at the end of 2005, with upcoming votes on left-over items from last year, and with the President's new budget, I wanted to come here to the floor to ensure that we all know the stakes of this great debate.

And I intend to be back, saying much the same, I fear, in the weeks and months ahead.

This year's budget, and the priorities it enacts, will not be lost to time, if I have anything to say about it. It is simply too important to forget.

As I listened to the President's State of the Union, I felt a real disconnect between his priorities and the challenges facing working families in Washington State, Americans across our country, and those fighting for our freedom abroad.

We all want America to be strong again and that means we must invest in our people and in our infrastructure. What the President said last week matters much less than what he does in his budget.

That budget is a document of values, and it will tell us if he is really intent on creating a brighter future for America or just giving us more of the same.

It is time to put the needs of America's working families first. We need a government that reflects our values and provides real economic incentives to encourage job creation.

We can do that by investing in our infrastructure, providing affordable, accessible healthcare, supporting energy independence, providing education for all of our children, and protecting our ports and borders.

These are the priorities that will make our Union and our families strong. We also have a moral obligation to ensure that our troops who serve and protect all of us have the resources they need on the battlefield and when they return home.

Unfortunately, if last year's budget and this year's speech are any indication, the President's priorities are simply not in line with those of the American public.

Almost exactly 1 year ago, the President previewed his FY 2006 budget in the State of the Union Address. He said:

My budget substantially reduces or eliminates more than 150 Government programs that are not getting results, or duplicate current efforts, or do not fulfill essential priorities. The principle here is clear: Taxpayer dollars must be spent wisely, or not at all.

A week later, we received a budget from President Bush that slashed health care programs, punished veterans, cut education aid, and increased the long-term financial obligation we'll leave to the next generation. His "non-essential priorities" were made quite clear.

In choosing to vote against that budget, I said:

Families in Washington State and across the country are concerned about the security of their jobs, their communities, access to affordable health care and a quality education. Unfortunately, rather than inspiring confidence, the budget we are voting on tonight leaves too many Americans questioning the future.

On issue after issue, this budget falls short of what our communities and our country need to move forward.

I know what responsible budgets look like because I've worked with chairmen of both parties to create them.

Unfortunately, this Republican budget fails to create jobs, improve security and meet our country's needs.

Mr. President, last year's budget proposal was a disaster. It cut Medicaid—the health care for our most vulnerable. It cut education. It cut veterans funding. And incredibly, once again, it increased the deficit.

The President has rightly been focused on our Nation's security, but his budget didn't reflect the type of priorities that keep Americans safe. Speeches are one thing, but they ring hollow