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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Move deeply in our hearts today, O Lord, so that we will conform to Your ways. Help us to understand Your purposes and submit to Your providence.

Empower our lawmakers to do Your will. Make them hungry and thirsty for Your spirit and power. Show them Your plan. Teach them Your paths. Instruct them on how to make our world a better place so that the sacrifices of those who die for our freedoms will not be in vain.

Open doors of greater opportunity for service as our Senators seek to be instruments for Your glory. May pleasing You become the primary aim of their labors. We pray in Your righteous Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable SHELDON WHITEHOUSE 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. BYRD].

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, January 24, 2007.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, a Senator from the State of Rhode Island, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE 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. REID. Mr. President, morning business this morning will not be the full hour. When the Republican leader and I complete our brief statements to the body, the time will be divided 50-50, with the first half of the time being controlled by the Democrats and the second half of the time being controlled by the Republicans.

At 10:30, we will resume consideration of H.R. 2, the minimum wage bill. The time until 11:30 will be equally divided or controlled between the two leaders or their designees regarding the Gregg amendment. The cloture vote will occur at 11:30.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

I ask unanimous consent that the majority time prior to the cloture vote with respect to the Gregg amendment be equally divided between Senators CONRAD and KENNEDY, and I also indicate that following the cloture vote, if cloture is not invoked on the Gregg amendment, there will be an immediate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on H.R. 2, the minimum wage bill. Members have until 10:30 this morning to file second-degree amendments.

Progress was made yesterday. The Sessions amendments were disposed of—voted upon, modified, or with-

drawn. That was good progress. There are seven amendments pending presently. As I recall, there are three by Senator ENSIGN, most dealing with Social Security; Senator BUNNING has one dealing with Social Security; Senator KYL has one dealing with depreciation; Senator SUNUNU has one dealing with women's business centers. I think those are the only amendments now pending. So we ask that Senators continue to work through this bill. We are going to agree to set aside the pending amendments so Senators can offer other amendments so we can move through this bill as quickly as possible.

I hope Senators realize there must come an end to this process. We will see what happens after the two cloture votes as to what we will do for the rest of the week.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

FINISHING H.R. 2

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, we encourage all Members who may have amendments on this side to come down. As the majority leader indicated, we will make progress on the bill this morning, and we look forward to finishing this bill some time in the future.

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

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



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of morning business until 10:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee, and the second half of the time under the control of the minority leader or his designee.

The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

ENERGY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last night in the State of the Union Address, President Bush, for the seventh year running, raised the issue of energy. I am glad he did because I think everybody across America understands we are in a dangerous position. We are entirely dependent upon imports from foreign countries when it comes to our energy needs and our economy.

It is true that we produce our own oil and gas in this country, but we don't produce enough to fuel our economy. So we find ourselves buying oil from countries far and wide across the globe. We find ourselves in positions where we are compromised sometimes by that dependence. Many of us have felt that the President's first goal or task should be to establish the reduction of our dependence upon foreign oil. I think that is a worthy goal and one I wish the President had quantified last night a little more specifically than he did.

The reason, of course, is if we can find a way to reduce dependence upon foreign oil, for example, we might have several positive impacts: first, not entangling ourselves in the foreign policy goals of countries we don't share many values with; second, it is good for our security interests to have sources of fuel that are reliable closer to home; third, of course, we are dealing with an environmental issue here. The more gasoline we burn to move a mile or two miles down the road, the more emissions and the more global warming; the more global warming, the more climate change and a disastrous environmental impact.

So many of us believe that though the President continues to refer to the problem, he has never quite moved us as we would like in the direction of a solution.

Last night, he said two things that were more encouraging. As I said, this is the seventh year the President has brought up the issue. He made a famous statement last year about America's addiction to oil. In the ensuing 12 months, we did little or nothing in Washington to address that addiction.

Assuming the same addiction today, the President said we should move toward alternative fuels, which I heartily support, not just biofuels, such as ethanol and biodiesel, but other alternative fuels that could make a big difference in the way we drive our cars, heat our homes, and fuel our businesses.

The second issue the President talked about, which is long overdue, is

addressing the CAFE standards. These, of course, were standards created in 1975 by Congress. At the time, we knew we had a problem. The problem was obvious—that we had too much dependence on foreign oil and prices were going up. By today's standards, they were not going up that high, but by the standards of those days they were.

In addition, the cars and trucks we were driving were inefficient. In fact, the average miles per gallon in 1975 for cars and trucks was about 13, 14 miles per gallon. At that point, Congress worked up the courage, with the cooperation of the President, to set a new goal and said that in 10 years, we will virtually double the fuel efficiency of the cars and trucks in America.

The negotiations got underway, and they decided to exempt trucks—we will go after cars and we will go after the fleet average of cars.

It worked. In a span of 10 years, we went from 13 or 14 miles a gallon average mileage to 27, 28 miles a gallon. So we clearly showed that when given incentives and mandates, the automobile manufacturers could respond with a product that was more fuel efficient.

What happened after 1985, after we hit the 27, 28 miles a gallon average? We did nothing. For 21 straight years, we did nothing. What happened in addition, that little loophole we created for trucks, letting them off the hook, the SUVs drove right through it. They produced these big, heavy vehicles that became extremely popular with Americans. They classified them as trucks, and they had no requirements to be fuel efficient. So the overall use of gasoline continued to increase, and the overall efficiency of the cars and trucks we drive went down as more and more SUVs and trucks were built that were exempt from the CAFE standards. Twenty-one years passed and things got progressively worse as we imported more and more fuel—dramatically more and more fuel—to burn in cars and trucks that were significantly more inefficient than those we had in 1985.

I have tried, on the floor of this Senate, three different times to reimpose CAFE standards on cars and trucks, to close loopholes and to move us back in the direction of more efficient cars and trucks, and I failed every time. Maybe things have changed. I credit a lot of people for this new debate.

What troubled me last night was the President, I felt, acknowledged the energy issue but gave scant attention to the environmental aspect. It is true that most of us understand we are going through a climate change in America. If you have seen Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," he documents and brings the facts forward to make the argument that this climate change is changing the world we live in on a permanent basis.

I recently returned from an official trip with my colleagues to South America, where leaders in that region

of the world said, when asked, they saw ample evidence of climate change—glacier melt and changes in things they thought would never change. We have seen it in America. We have seen it in the weather we find in different regions of our country, the extremes which we have witnessed and experienced.

My point is I hope we can take the President's invitation in his speech last night to the next level. I hope we can start talking about an energy policy that does make sense. The starting point ought to be a realistic goal for reducing our dependence on foreign oil. We ought to understand, if we can move forward with more efficient cars and trucks, give consumers in America more choices, that they will, given those choices, make the right choice, time and again.

Sadly, the production of these fuel-efficient cars has been led by foreign manufacturers and not by the United States. That has to come to an end.

I might say, although I support biofuels, ethanol, and biodiesel, although I believe flexible fuel vehicles are sensible for people to own and drive, it is not enough, and we shouldn't delude ourselves into believing it is enough. We need to move toward those hybrid vehicles that truly burn less fuel and move people in America to the places they need to go. We can do that, but we need to move in a sensible way.

Let me give two examples. There are two companies in my State of Illinois. One is Firefly. Firefly is a spinoff of Caterpillar Tractor company. It is an independent company that is trying to design a new battery for cars and trucks. The lead-acid battery, which most use today, is ancient and heavy and inefficient and in extreme temperatures doesn't work well. They are investing in research to find a new battery that is lighter and has a longer life. I don't know if theirs will be the breakthrough technology, but we need to encourage companies such as Firefly to develop the new batteries that can lead to better hybrid cars and more fuel efficiency.

Secondly, one of the biggest problems we have with fuel efficiency is the weight of the vehicle. If we can reduce the weight of the vehicle without compromising safety, we can get more fuel efficiency. I happen to have another company in Illinois—I am certainly proud of my State and what we do; these happen to be two companies relevant to the discussion—this company in Illinois has now a new titanium alloy that can be derived at a much lower cost.

Titanium holds the promise of being stronger than steel and lighter than aluminum. So this could be the answer to a car chassis that is safe and lighter. Combining those two items might offer a prospect for a vehicle in the future which would be much more fuel efficient.

Why aren't we promoting companies such as those companies? If we truly