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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, a Senator from the State of Maryland.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, You have said that the truth will set us free. We thank You that Your idea of freedom leads to harmony and not discord, to consensus and not conflict.

Liberate our lawmakers from deceptions that distort and misrepresent facts. Teach them the fine art of conciliation, and inspire them to choose rational roads instead of emotional dead ends. May they commit their time, effort, and resources in formulating policy which is in accordance with Your will.

Lord, lift them above partisan rancor, and give them the power to walk in Your light, to act in Your strength, to think with Your wisdom, to speak with Your truth, and to live in Your love. We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable BENJAMIN L. CARDIN 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 28, 2007.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, a Senator from the State of Maryland, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

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

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 1591

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the previous order with respect to the timing of the three rollcall votes this morning be modified to provide that the votes be delayed until 11:45 a.m., under the same sequence as previously ordered and the other provisions as previously ordered; that following the 60 minutes of debate, the amendments be set aside and that Senator COBURN then be recognized to debate his pending amendments and that all other provisions remain in effect.

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this morning, as indicated, we are going to have a change of schedule, but it will work out just fine. I have spoken with the distinguished Republican leader. We are going to do what we can to finish this bill today. It is extremely important. It will give the House and Senate 2 full days prior to the recess to have this important bill worked on in regard to the conference that must take place. Hopefully, the first day or two that we get back after the break, we can have a conference report to vote on. I hope we can do that. That would be extremely important if we could.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 997 AND S. 1001

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before I turn to my distinguished Republican colleague, it is my understanding that there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bills by title for a second time.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 997) to amend the Public Health Service Act to provide for human embryonic stem cell research.

A bill (S. 1001) to restore Second Amendment rights in the District of Columbia.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I object to any further proceedings with respect to these bills, en bloc.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard. The bills will be placed on the calendar.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the first vote will be with respect to the Wyden county payments amendment, then the Burr county payments amendment, followed by a vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the bill. Members have 10 minutes to file their motions for cloture.



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their second-degree amendments. Other votes will likely occur this afternoon.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, there are a number of germane amendments which will be in order postclosure. I have indicated to the majority leader that we hope to have a number of those voted on. Whether we finish this bill today or tomorrow, I certainly share the view of the majority leader that we need to get this bill conference by staff at the very least—both the staff of the House and the Senate—over the break so that the conference can be completed, we can get the bill down to the President for a veto, and get it passed in a form that gets the funding to our troops at the earliest possible point. There will be maximum cooperation on this side toward that end. We need to get through this process and repass this bill as quickly as possible because the troops need the money.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

U.S. TROOP READINESS, VETERANS' HEALTH, AND IRAQ ACCOUNTABILITY ACT, 2007

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1591, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1591) making emergency supplemental appropriations for fiscal year ending September 30, 2007, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Cochran (for Lugar) amendment No. 690, to provide that, of the funds appropriated by this act under the headings "DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR PROGRAMS" and "ECONOMIC SUPPORT FUND" (except for the Community Action Program), up to \$50 million may be made available to support and maintain a civilian reserve corps.

Wyden amendment No. 709, to reauthorize the secure rural schools and community self-determination program and to provide funding for the payments in lieu of taxes program.

Obama amendment No. 664, to appropriate an additional \$58 million for Defense Health Program for additional mental health and related personnel, an additional \$10 million for operation and maintenance for each of the military departments for improved physical disability evaluations of members of the

Armed Forces, and an additional \$15 million for Defense Health Program for women's mental health services.

Burr amendment No. 716 (to amendment No. 709) to require that payments to eligible States and eligible counties only be used for public schools.

Webb amendment No. 692, to prohibit the use of funds for military operations in Iran.

Coburn amendment No. 648, to remove \$100 million in funding for the Republican and Democratic Party conventions in 2008.

Coburn amendment No. 649, to remove a \$2 million earmark for the University of Vermont.

Coburn amendment No. 656, to require timely public disclosure of Government reports submitted to Congress.

Coburn amendment No. 657, to provide farm assistance in a fiscally responsible manner.

Coburn amendment No. 717, to make certain provisions inapplicable.

Coburn amendment No. 718, to make certain provisions inapplicable.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 709 AND 716

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there is 30 minutes of debate on amendments Nos. 709 and 716, with the time equally divided between the Senator from Oregon, Mr. WYDEN, and the Senator from North Carolina, Mr. BURR.

Who yields time?

The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to add Senator HATCH and Senator ROCKEFELLER as co-sponsors of our bipartisan amendment.

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

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, it is my intent to take a couple of minutes to lay out the reason it is so important to pass this county payments amendment this morning. Then I plan to yield 5 minutes to my good friend and teammate on this issue, Senator CRAIG, and then it is my intent to close for our side.

This issue of county payments funding is literally an issue of survival for rural counties across this country. It is going to determine whether the Federal Government will keep a more than 100-year obligation to rural communities or whether the Federal Government is going to turn its back on these communities and allow them to become national sacrifice zones.

Mr. President, 100 years ago, the Federal Government entered into an agreement with rural communities in exchange for creating national forests and restricting how local communities manage their forest lands. The Government would provide a partial payment so those local communities could pay for essential services, such as law enforcement and education. But the most recent law guaranteeing those payments—the law the distinguished Senator from Idaho and I wrote, the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act—has expired. If the law is not extended—the safety net payments rural communities need in order to carry out essential serv-

ices—without those dollars, there will be havoc in rural communities across our country.

The votes the Senate is going to soon take are going to decide the future of a lot of these rural communities, and there are two approaches. First, there is the approach Senator CRAIG and I and a bipartisan group of 17 Senators favor that is flexible, that ensures we don't make the decisions in Washington, DC, we don't micromanage these local communities but give them the flexibility at the local level to make choices that make sense for them.

This legislation is sponsored by both Republican Senators from Idaho, both Democratic Senators from Washington State, and many others. We have a broad coalition. The National Association of Counties, labor groups, education advocates—all have said that the approach that makes sense for them is our bipartisan amendment, and they have not been in favor of the amendment offered by the Senator from North Carolina.

I am now going to make 5 minutes from our time available to my friend and colleague, Senator CRAIG. I thank him again for his support.

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

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Oregon for yielding. He has clearly outlined the critical nature of this legislation and its reauthorization from the original Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2005. Out in Oregon, they called it Wyden-Craig; in Idaho, they called it Craig-Wyden. But in reality, it became a lifeline for the rural communities that since 1908 had become increasingly dependent upon the revenues that flowed from our public lands. In fact, on and after May 23, 1908—and I am quoting specifically from the law—"25 per centum of all moneys received during any fiscal year from each national forest shall be paid at the end of such year by the Secretary of the Treasury to the State or the territory" in which that money was generated for the purpose of it flowing down to, it very specifically says, "public schools, public roads of the county or counties in which such national forests are situated."

During the decade of the eighties, we reduced the allowable cut on our forested lands by nearly 80 percent. What Senator WYDEN and I recognized at that time—we had counties in near bankruptcy—as a result of that, in 2000, we passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act. That act expired on September 30, 2006. Whom did it impact? It impacted 700 counties, 4,400 school districts in 39 States, 8 million schoolkids, and approximately 15,000 miles of roads.

We knew that probably the formula would have to change, and the Senator from Oregon and I have worked mightily on that issue. He offered a reauthorization of the old formula. I finally offered a 1-year extension. We were able