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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JON TESTER, a Senator from the State of Montana.

PRAAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, the way, the truth, and the life, give our lawmakers growth of ethical vision that, with the passing of years, they may enter into the fullness of faith. Uphold them in their disappointments and make them patient, even amid the unsolved mysteries of life's seasons. Let such robust confidence in You shine through their lives with such persuasive beauty that it will dispel the darkness of fear and doubt. Lift their lives from the battle zone of combative words to a caring community, where leaders communicate esteem and respect to each other. Lord, help them to trust in Your unfailing love and to rejoice at the unfolding of Your merciful providence.

We pray in the Name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JON TESTER 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 letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, May 13, 2008.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable JON TESTER, a Senator from the State of Montana, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. TESTER 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, following leader time, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 2284, the flood insurance legislation. There will be 60 minutes for debate equally divided and controlled in the usual form prior to a series of votes. Senators should expect votes to begin shortly after 11, maybe 11:10 or thereabouts, in relation to the following items: The McConnell amendment on energy with a 60-vote threshold; Reid amendment on energy with a 60-vote threshold; passage of S. 2284, the flood insurance legislation; cloture on the motion to proceed to H.R. 980, first responders collective bargaining. As a reminder, the Senate will recess from 12:30 until 2:15 today to allow the weekly caucus luncheons to meet.

OBSTRUCTIONISM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we have talked now for several months about the number of filibusters. Today, this will be raised to 71. Comments have been made by Republican leaders that it doesn't matter; we are just doing the people's business; we are only getting done what is important.

The American people know what is going on. It is obstructionism at its zenith, at its best. The American people are beginning clearly to see this issue.

A story in newspapers all around the country today, based on an article by Jon Cowen and Dan Balz in the Washington Post, indicates that the American people are seeing what is going on.

In polling done by the Post, along with others, the political party in America best able to deal with the country's problems: Democrats, by a 21-point advantage. It is obvious why. We are trying to do something about the problems facing America today. We are trying to do something about the intractable civil war we are engaged in in Iraq. We have a situation where we have 50 million people with no health insurance. We have the Earth's temperature rising every day. Our Earth has a fever. We need to do something legislatively to try to bring down that fever. We have an education system that is in crumbles. We want to do something about educating the troops coming back from Iraq. We believe these troops are just as gallant and heroic as the troops who fought in World War II. When the World War II troops came home, they had the ability to go to school and were educated, and it happened. It changed America forever. We think America could be changed forever again in the new paradigm we now face with these men and women coming back by the tens of thousands and not being able to afford to go to school.

We know that the Presidential candidate of the Republicans, Senator McCAIN, says it is too generous. Well, this piece of legislation, written by JIM WEBB, is generous, but it should be because these troops returning from Iraq deserve our generosity.

The Democratic advantage is going to be pronounced come election time. We have tried to work on a cooperative basis and have been denied that time after time after time. We know that

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



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Bush's disapproval rating in some polls is around 70 percent. Think about that. We have had a number of stories written in just the last 10 days that the lowest approval rating of any President in history is the President we are now dealing with, a person who is a divider, not a uniter. The American people see this. Eighty-two percent of the American people feel our country is headed in the wrong direction. I would hope that during the next few months we have left in this legislative session, we can stop the increase in this number here and work to try to accomplish good results for the American people. We have so much that needs to be done. We want to work to get this done. If we are able to accomplish things, there is credit to go around for everyone, Democrats and Republicans. But, of course, the obstructionism we face has made it so that there is no credit to go around, period. The American people have identified this, and rightfully so.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

ENERGY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, later this morning we will vote on an amendment to increase production of American energy, which will help lower prices at the pump and create more American jobs. Last year, this Congress acted in a bipartisan way to reduce our demand for oil by increasing fuel economy standards for cars and trucks and by increasing our use of renewable fuels. But no matter how hard we might try, we cannot repeal the law of supply and demand. We know we also need to increase supply in order to lower gas prices, and that is what our amendment does.

In the short term, it places a 6-month moratorium on deposits to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which will immediately have an impact on domestic supply. It also increases production of American energy right here at home by opening a small portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for production and allowing coastal States to decide if they want to allow increased production on the Outer Continental Shelf. It repeals the moratorium on oil shale development that was included in last year's Omnibus appropriations bill, and it would encourage the development of coal to liquid, a very promising substitute for petroleum products that we can produce right here in America and specifically in Kentucky, my home State, with American workers. Our amendment would provide grants and loans to accelerate the development of advanced batteries that can be used to power the next generation of plug-in hybrid vehicles here in America. These measures, coupled with the conservation and biofuels measure

we supported last year, will increase our energy independence and help to bring down gas prices in the long term.

Some say opening new areas for production won't do anything in the short term. But remember, if President Clinton had not vetoed legislation to open ANWR 13 years ago, more than a million barrels of oil would be flowing to American consumers every single day. I believe it makes more sense for us to produce these additional barrels here at home with American jobs rather than begging OPEC to produce more, as some on the other side have advocated.

I urge my colleagues to consider our long-term energy goals and our need for increased energy independence and vote in favor of this amendment.

We can't continue to ignore the No. 1 issue facing American families, and further delay is not an option that Americans can afford. Some of our friends on the other side of the aisle believe we need to ask OPEC to supply more oil, that we ought to be sending even more money and jobs to the nations of OPEC. But we take a different approach. Our amendment would increase the production right here at home in America. While some want to increase OPEC's control over oil supply by refusing an increase in American supply, our amendment increases American control through American energy and American jobs right here in the United States.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

FLOOD INSURANCE REFORM AND MODERNIZATION ACT OF 2007

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 2284, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2284) to amend the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, to restore the financial solvency of the flood insurance fund, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Dodd/Shelby amendment No. 4707, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell amendment No. 4720 (to the text of the bill proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 4707), of a perfecting nature.

Allard amendment No. 4721 (to amendment No. 4720), of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be 1 hour of debate equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I would like to speak to the amendment which we will vote on shortly. It relates to the cost of gasoline. I can't think of another issue that has been in the forefront across America for a longer pe-

riod than the cost of gasoline. It goes beyond that, obviously, to diesel fuel and jet fuel costs. We see it every day. You drive down the road, and you watch prices going up at the gas station. People ask Senators and Congressmen: You are supposed to be the bigwigs here. You are supposed to be so influential. Why haven't you done something; the gas prices are killing us.

And they are. Whether it is a family member commuting back and forth to work in downstate Illinois, trying to get to the State capitol, whether it is a an over-the-road trucker spending almost \$1,000 to fill up his rig with diesel fuel, whether it is the CEO of an airline who has seen the worst first-quarter losses in the history of that airline because of the rise in the cost of jet fuel, it is hitting everybody. I talked to a chiropractor over the weekend. She told me her practice was dying because people didn't want to drive 20 miles for her services. They said: We will see you every other week instead of every week. As you see, it is starting to reach into every single area.

So what response do we have from the Republican side? The response is predictable and ineffective. Here is what they say: You know what we ought to do. We ought to start drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and we ought to start drilling for oil off the coasts of America.

OK. How much oil is there?

Oh, there is a lot.

In the scheme of things, it is not a lot. All of the oil reserves within the control of the United States of America, all of them combined come to 3 percent of the world's total oil reserves. Each year, our Nation—a powerful, large economy—consumes 25 percent of all the oil produced in the world. We cannot drill our way out of this issue. We cannot drill our way to lower prices.

Here is something they fail to mention: If we gave approval today—which I think would be a bad idea—to the Republican approach, it would be years before the oil would start trickling in, meaning years of high prices.

So what can we do here and now? Two things: First, we can start dealing with the price gouging of consumers. Prices are going up dramatically at historically high rates. They are not justifiable by the barrel-of-oil prices. The spread between the cost of a barrel of oil and the cost of refined product keeps growing larger and larger, and the oil companies that are refining the crude oil keep making more and more money. Price gouging is going on. That is the first issue. Is there any mention of consumer price gouging in the Republican approach? Not one word. In the Democratic approach, we believe price gouging should be part of this.

Secondly, accountability of the oil companies. These oil companies, over the last 7 years when George Bush from oil country has been our President, have seen their profits quadruple—four