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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MARK L. PRYOR, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, sustainer of humanity, we thank You for commanding light to shine out of darkness, for stretching out the heavens, and laying the foundation of the Earth. We praise You for calling us to be Your people, for revealing Your purposes and Your sacred word, and for dealing patiently with our pride and disobedience.

Bless the Members of this body and all who support them. Give them such trust in You that, holding onto Your word, they may be strong in this and every time of need. Impart to them, Lord, grace to permit You to order their steps. Give them the gift of Your Holy Spirit that they may be faithful servants and stewards of Your will.

We pray in the Name of our Lord and Savior. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable MARK L. PRYOR 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, June 12, 2008.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable MARK L. PRYOR, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. PRYOR 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 the remarks of myself and Senator MCCONNELL, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 3101, the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act, with the time until 3 p.m. equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees. Senators GRASSLEY, BAUCUS, MCCONNELL, and REID of Nevada will control the final 40 minutes, with 10 minutes each under their control. The order of speakers will be as I have mentioned. At 3 p.m., the Senate will proceed to vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to the bill.

MEASURE PLACED ON CALENDAR—S. 3118

Mr. REID. Mr. President, S. 3118 is at the desk and due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will state the bill for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3118) to amend titles XVIII and XIX of the Social Security Act to preserve beneficiary access to care by preventing a reduction in the Medicare physician fee schedule, to improve the quality of care by advancing value based purchasing, electronic health records, and electronic prescribing, and to maintain and improve access to care in rural areas, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I object to any further proceedings at this time regarding this bill.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

GRADUAL ADJUSTMENT DAY TWO

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today the national average for a gallon of regular unleaded gasoline hit another all-time high of \$4.06. For truckers it's even worse, with the average cost of diesel now at \$4.79 a gallon.

Every American is suffering the effects of high gas prices. But low- and middle-income families are hurting the most. Many now spend a significant portion of their income just getting to and from work. A good number of people in eastern Kentucky are spending 15 percent of their income just on gas.

Some people are taking second jobs just to cover the cost of getting to and from their primary jobs.

Prices are so high Democrats are starting to talk about gas prices being a serious problem. A number of them spoke yesterday about the effect that gas prices have on the wider economy.

The junior Senator from Colorado told us about a farmer in Kit Carson County who is worried he won't be able to afford the diesel fuel he needs to harvest his wheat crop at the end of the summer.

The junior Senator from Montana said manufacturers in his State are at risk of shutting down, that truckers are struggling to make ends meet, and farmers are struggling to pay for fertilizer. The junior Senator from Minnesota said the people of her State are lining up around the block at the

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



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Costco in Minneapolis just to save some money.

Even the senior Senator from New York got in on the act, though mostly as an excuse to go after the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts. I am not sure how this was relevant to gas prices. Maybe he thought people would feel better if they realized they'd be even worse off if we hadn't cut their taxes.

But to all our friends on the other side who have spoken about the crushing effects of high gas prices, I would simply add that they are right on target. High gas prices do affect everything. High gas prices do hurt. And I would also add this: Democrats in Congress have no plan to lower them.

In a month when gas prices have hit record highs, Democrats have proposed three things: a massive carbon tax, a tax on energy companies, and allowing trial lawyers to sue our trading partners. This isn't an energy plan. It is a caricature. It is a caricature of a party that seems incapable of conceiving any solution to any problem that doesn't involve taxation or litigation.

With gas prices causing unprecedented pain at the pump for working Americans, Democrats have responded by trying to raise taxes that we know will be passed onto consumers. Ignoring the iron laws of supply and demand, they insist that high gas prices must be the result of some corporate plot instead. But the current crisis is a supply and demand problem—not a supply and demand and litigation problem, not a supply and demand and taxation problem, a supply and demand problem.

It is fairly straightforward: at the moment, there's greater demand than supply. And last year, Republicans joined Democrats in addressing demand by passing the first increase in national fuel efficiency standards in more than 30 years. We have also tried to address the supply problem by increasing production of American energy. At every turn, we have been blocked.

Since 1991, the Senate has voted a dozen times on allowing limited exploration in a small portion of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. A Democrat President has vetoed it or Democrats have blocked it every single time. When he did it, incidentally, gas at the pump was \$1.06 a gallon.

Last year, the Senate voted on proposals to expand refinery capacity, invest in coal-to-liquid technology, and open up more domestic reserves. Democrats blocked each one.

Last year, Republicans proposed allowing Virginia to go forward with deep sea exploration off its coast—something that Virginia, under a Democratic Governor, wants. Democrats in Congress said no.

Republicans have tried to allow the use of oil shale from Western States as an alternative to foreign oil. Democrats imposed an oil-shale ban in last year's Omnibus Appropriations bill.

Last month, Republicans tried to increase production of American energy again, along with an increase in sup-

port for clean energy technology and plug-in hybrid vehicles. Democrats said no.

And just last week, I offered an amendment to ensure that if the Boxer climate tax bill caused gas prices to go up, we would suspend its provisions. Democrats blocked that too.

For years, Democrats have blocked every effort to increase the production of American energy and help bring gas prices down. They have said no to States that want to allow for deep sea exploration off their shores. They have blocked the use of oil shale. They have blocked a dozen efforts to open a small portion of ANWR for environmentally sensitive exploration, which—if it had not been vetoed 13 years ago—would be providing a million barrels of oil a day to American consumers right now.

That's twice as much as the senior Senator from New York wants us to beg from the Saudis. And now, they want to raise gas prices even more through higher taxes.

It should be abundantly clear by now to anyone who is paying attention that our friends on the other side have no serious plan for lowering gas prices. As the record suggests, their primary concern is blocking increased production, which has inexorably led to record gas prices.

If people are being forced to change their lifestyles, if the price of goods is skyrocketing, that is apparently all right, according to our friends on the other side. Their Presidential nominee even admits it. He says the high price of gas isn't the problem. The problem, he says, is that prices went up too quickly. If he had his way, he would have raised prices much more slowly.

He would have preferred that gas prices go up more slowly than the \$1 increase we have seen under the new Democrat Congress over the last year.

He would have preferred they go up more slowly than the astonishing \$1.73 increase per gallon of gasoline we have seen just in the 17 months since Democrats took over Congress in January 2007.

As the Democrat nominee put it in an interview earlier this week, he would have preferred a "gradual readjustment" in gas prices, presumably so Americans wouldn't notice the shock of it.

We used to think \$4 a gallon gasoline was unthinkable. Our friends on the other side were apparently thinking about it all along. "I think I would have preferred a gradual readjustment."

Those are the words of their nominee.

While Americans are reeling over high gas prices, increasingly demanding that we increase our production of American energy, Democrats haven't let us turn over a single shovel for exploration here at home. And now they have got what they wanted.

We all agree that the key to our energy future is clean energy technologies and alternative fuels that

move us away from oil. What the other side refuses to acknowledge is that it will take some time to get there. We are moving in that direction as quickly as we can. We have worked in a bipartisan fashion in both the 2005 and 2007 energy bills to accelerate the process of moving to clean energy technologies and alternative sources of fuel.

But the facts are clear: in the short term, America will depend on fossil fuels to drive our economy. For the foreseeable future, our choice is the same as it's always been: either import our energy from people like Hugo Chavez and from Saudi Arabia or use more of our own. But our friends on the other side have removed the option of increased American energy created by increasing American jobs. They have made sure we have only one option. They have put domestic energy off limits. And now we're paying the price.

Republicans have been willing to work with Democrats to address both sides of this problem. Republicans enthusiastically support conservation.

Last year, we supported the first increase in automobile efficiency standards in more than three decades. We have supported investments in alternative energy. We know this problem requires action on both the supply and the demand side. And we have shown it. But we're still waiting for our friends on the other side to show the same commitment to actually address the problem.

For the sake of all the American people, who will today make hard choices at the gas pump, we need to work together to lower prices now, and that means that as the third largest oil producer in the world, America needs to increase its own domestic supplies in an environmentally responsible way so we are less reliant on Middle East oil and so our people finally get some relief.

21ST ANNIVERSARY OF "TEAR DOWN THIS WALL"

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today is the anniversary of an important event in recent world history that demonstrates the impact that words—well-chosen words—can have.

June 12, 1987, marks the day that President Ronald Reagan issued a challenge to Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev to make unmistakably clear his commitment to lessening Cold War tensions and increasing freedom in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe.

Speaking before the Brandenburg Gate in what was then West Berlin, President Reagan stood only 100 yards away from the Berlin Wall, which had divided the free people of West Berlin from the captive Germans in Soviet-controlled East Berlin for decades. An estimated 20,000 people gathered to hear him, including West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

"There is one sign the Soviets could make that would be unmistakable,