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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held Wednesday, February 6, 2008, at 2 p.m.

Senate

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2008

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

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

We acknowledge today, O Lord, Your power, mercy, and grace. We need Your power for the challenges we face. We need Your mercy, for we transgress Your law and fall short of Your glory. We need Your grace, for we cannot offer anything to merit Your favor or gain Your love.

Empower our Senators for today's journey. Give them confidence to draw near to You that they may find grace to help them in this time of need. May they pass their days in Your presence. Enable them to learn the faithful stewardship of time, energy, and abundance. Temper their gifts with Your wisdom as You help them with their decisions. Remind them that leadership can work miracles with cooperation but accomplishes little with criticism and bitterness.

We pray in the Name of Him who came to bring peace on Earth. 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 bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 5, 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, this morning there will be an hour of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each. The first half of the time will be allocated to the minority, the second half to the majority.

ORDER OF RECOGNITION

I now ask unanimous consent that following morning business, I be recognized.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Americans are probably wondering why the rebate checks we have been talking about now for almost a month are still being debated on the floor of the Senate, and we owe them an answer.

Two weeks ago they saw what looked like a bipartisan agreement between Democrats and Republicans in Congress and the White House over the details of a deal. They saw Speaker PELOSI and Leader BOEHNER, to their great credit, resist the temptation to add pet projects that they knew would only slow the package down—and rob it of its stimulative effect. They heard a chorus of pleas from economists, trade groups, and Members of both parties in both Chambers endorsing this approach. This package had to be targeted and it had to be timely, or it wouldn't work at all.

So most days we find ourselves trying to explain to people why it takes so long to do things in the Senate. But this time was going to be different. Here was that rare situation when both parties agreed to put politics and individual interests aside and come together for the good of the people.

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



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But then the stimulus bullet train turned into a rickety stage coach here in the Senate. When it got right down to it, Senate Democrats couldn't do what House Democrats had done. They couldn't resist—not even one time—a chance to play politics.

If Americans are wondering why their checks aren't in the mail, they can find it in last week's news clips. Of particular interest is an AP story entitled "Politics Creeps into Stimulus Package." Democrats are holding onto the stimulus bill, the article said, not to speed up the rebate checks, but to try to make Republicans look bad in November. Asked about the amendments we were expecting to take up this week, the senior Senator from New York said, "It's tough votes for them." It's tough votes for them.

Now, the same AP article also helpfully points out that the senior Senator from New York is no sideline observer in this debate. It notes that he moonlights as chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. For people outside the beltway, that means he is in charge of recruiting and helping Democrat candidates for the Senate—which, this week, according to the AP, evidently involves holding up the stimulus bill over votes he thinks will help his candidates against Republicans in November.

Now I don't know if the thrust of this article was entirely accurate. But if it was, these are precisely the kind of shenanigans Americans had been hoping we could get past this year. And, frankly, Senate Republicans were hopeful after the speed with which the House approved its version of the growth package that Senate Democrats would also see the wisdom in coming together to deliver relief in a timely manner.

It's disappointing that politics would come to play a part in a deal that seemed refreshingly free from it for a change. But unfortunately, it seems the never-ending campaign that tainted so much of last year's Senate business has carried over to this year.

Last night, my good friend the majority leader suggested that Republicans were delaying action on the stimulus plan because we asked for some time to review his latest proposal—a full 4 days after he said he would deliver it. Never mind that passage of the Senate Democrats' bill forces a conference, worsening an already-prolonged process. Never mind that once we did take a look, we noticed an extra \$1 billion in spending, which I think most Americans would consider a significant addition. And never mind that our friends on the other side had no intention of voting on the package today anyway.

We could have disposed of this stimulus package a week ago, but our Democratic colleagues wanted, as they said, to put their "stamp" on it.

Mr. President, I don't think Americans care one bit whether this bill has a Republican or a Democratic stamp on

it. They are completely fed up with political gotcha. Americans want—and deserve—results.

Taxpayers will get their rebate checks and businesses will get their much-needed relief, but not without having to watch a show here for a few more days or a week—put on for the sake of a depressingly familiar political circus.

That is unacceptable to Republicans. I presume it is unacceptable to the 385 Democrats and Republicans who voted the stimulus package out of the House.

It is unacceptable to the more than 100 million American families who are probably still wondering why we are talking about this bill at all.

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

STIMULUS PACKAGE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, what we have seen here on the Senate floor this morning is very much in keeping with what has happened in the last 7 years with the Bush administration. The Bush administration is Orwellian. It says something that means something else. The President comes to town and wants to be a "uniter" and not a divider. The American people know how disingenuous that has been.

The President had the ceremony on an aircraft carrier. He had his flight suit on, with a big banner up saying "Mission Accomplished." That was almost 5 years ago. Since that time, 3,000 American soldiers have been killed, and more than 20,000 have been wounded. Is that Orwellian? I think so.

What has taken place here on the Senate floor today is in keeping with this Bush situation.

By the way, the Bush White House—for the first time in more than 130 years—has someone working in the White House who is indicted and convicted of a crime. The same White House had someone in charge of budgeting and taking care of Government contracts who is now in prison, Mr. Safavian. This is the same President who presided over a House majority leader who had two ethics convictions. What did he do to avoid any penalties? He changed the rules in the House until he was indicted by the State of Texas. Now, a number of House Members' staff who dealt with that are in prison, and others are planning on going there.

Mr. President, what we have heard today here on the Senate floor is as Orwellian as anything could be. Two weeks ago, the House passed a bipartisan bill. Sure, they did. They sent it over here for us. Under the Constitution, we have an obligation to consider that. It is an insult to the bipartisan bill that came out of the Senate Finance Committee to call this matter which is now before the Senate "Senators' pet projects."

We have millions of people who are out of work and others who are looking at being out of work. We have in our

bill a "pet project" calling for extending unemployment benefits. That is our "pet project." I have to stand accused, and I am guilty of that because I support that.

As we speak, we have some people—even though in Washington it is fairly warm and the low last night was 41, other people are cold. We have a "pet project" in the bill dealing with giving them assistance so they can pay their heating bills. They will spend that money very quickly.

We have another "pet project" that was supported on a bipartisan basis in the bill to give homeowners relief. One of the "pet projects" in this bill was talked about by the President in his State of the Union Message. When we heard him say it, we all knew he probably didn't really mean it, but he talked about doing something to refinance homes that are in default. We took the President's word, and one of our "pet projects" is what the President wanted and which is in this Senate stimulus package.

To talk about the timely nature of this, a rebate check, even under the most generous timeframe, cannot come until after the income tax returns are filed in April of this year. So we are moving this as quickly as we should.

One of the "pet projects" we have in this bill is to take care of about 250,000 disabled veterans—American veterans who, in the course of their duties serving this country, have become disabled. We, as one of our "pet projects," decided it would be nice—if everyone else was getting a rebate check, shouldn't a disabled veteran get one? So that is a "pet project." I support it, and I think it is very important.

One of the "pet projects" we support—and I think there is bipartisan support for it—is to take care of 21.5 million seniors who, with the House-passed bill, get a big goose egg—nothing. I have not criticized the House bill. It was a good start. But even Speaker PELOSI, my dear friend, recognizes that what they did is inadequate and that what we are going to do is much better. We are going to give 21.5 million seniors a rebate. What does that mean? They will spend it and stimulate the economy.

Mr. President, to say they need time to read this gargantuan bill we have—it was best summarized by the Senator from California; she did it last night. Senator BOXER brought to the Senate floor the addition to the bill that they are still reading. It is a page and a half long. So we have had 12 to 14 hours; they could have read two or three words an hour and gotten through that.

Today, we should be able to finish the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act legislation and have a time set for tomorrow to finish the vote on the stimulus package. Sixty votes is all we want. There are 51 Democrats, and everyone will vote for this. It is the House package with those "pet projects" that take care of seniors, disabled veterans, and a few other people