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Senate

(Legislative day of Wednesday, September 17, 2008)

The Senate met at 3 p.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, sovereign Lord of the universe, limitless, timeless, in whom resides all wisdom and power, remind our Senators today that they have nothing to fear about the future when they remember how You have led us in the past. Energize their memories to remember the dangers, toils, and snares over which You have brought our Nation and world so that Your peace will guard their hearts. Lord, may they never forget that the galaxies belong to You and the fullness thereof, the world, and they who dwell therein. Teach them the wisdom of seeking You so that they will fulfill Your purposes for their lives.

We pray in the Name of Him who is the author and finisher of our faith. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JIM WEBB 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, September 22, 2008.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

DISCHARGED NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session and that the Senate Foreign Relations Committee be discharged from the following, and the Senate proceed to their consideration, en bloc: PN2053, Senator BILL NELSON, to be a Representative of the United States to the 63rd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and PN2054, Senator BOB CORKER of Tennessee, to be a Representative of the United States to the 63rd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations; that the nominations be confirmed and the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no other motion be in order; and that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

The nominations considered and confirmed are as follows:

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

BILL NELSON, of Florida, to be a Representative of the United States of America to the Sixty-third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

BOB CORKER, of Tennessee, to be a Representative of the United States of America to the Sixty-third Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will now return to legislative session.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will proceed to a period for the transaction of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. As previously announced, there will be no rollcall votes today.

Last week, we were able to reach an agreement to consider H.R. 6049, the tax extenders legislation. Following morning business tomorrow, the Senate will consider three amendments to the bill, with limited debate and votes in relation to the amendments. Senators should expect the first amendment vote to occur prior to the caucus lunches and the remaining votes in the afternoon. One of the things to consider now is maybe not having morning business tomorrow to move this along more rapidly.

The Republican leader is seeking recognition, and when he finishes, I will give a few remarks.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

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



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MAIN STREET RESCUE PLAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, when there is a fire in your kitchen threatening to burn down your home, you don't want someone stopping the firefighters on the way and demanding they hand out smoke detectors first or lecturing you about the hazards of keeping paint in the basement. You want them to put out the fire before it burns down your home and everything you have saved for your whole life.

The same is true of our current economic situation. We know there is a serious threat to our economy. We know we must take action to try to head off a serious blow to Main Street.

Over the weekend, Congress received a straightforward four-page Main Street rescue plan aimed at protecting millions of American families and small businesses from the potentially devastating effects of a credit meltdown. We are told that inaction could make it impossible for ordinary Americans to take out loans for college tuition, cars, new homes, and everything else, triggering a corresponding collapse in manufacturing and services that could wipe out savings and lead to massive job losses. The final cost of the plan is unclear, but the potential consequences of inaction are not.

This proposal was designed to contain a spreading crisis, and urgent action is needed. That is why Republicans have resisted the impulse to try to add permanent tax relief and other aid to families and businesses that we believe is critical to the long-term health of our Nation's economy. And we ask our colleagues across the aisle to show similar restraint so that whatever action we take can be done quickly and in time to make a real difference.

This stabilization plan gives us an opportunity to prevent long-term damage to Americans' savings, home values, and livelihoods—to contain the problem from spreading to Main Street. Surely we can all agree to work with each other and stand up for the American people instead of using the bill as fly paper for partisan add-ons.

Republicans have many serious questions about this plan, but this is the only concrete plan we have seen so far that aims to protect Americans on Main Street—to protect their homes, their savings, their retirement plans, protect endangered jobs and small businesses—and we shouldn't jeopardize that effort by delaying urgent action or playing partisan politics.

Americans want to know their savings and retirement accounts are safe. They want the security of knowing the problems on Wall Street are not going to spread to Main Street. The only way we can give them that security and that assurance is by putting partisan interests aside.

There will be many more questions about this plan. I have many myself. But we owe it to the American people to do our due diligence quickly and act swiftly, Democrats and Republicans

alike, to contain this crisis before it is too late.

I am confident that we can work together. The American people are counting on us. Let's not disappoint them.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

MASTER SERGEANT THOMAS L. BRUNER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to pay tribute to one of Kentucky's great heroes in uniform. MSG Thomas L. Bruner of Owensboro, KY, was tragically lost while serving his country in Afghanistan on October 28, 2007. A proud member of the Army Reserves for many years, he was 50 years old.

For his valor in uniform, Master Sergeant Bruner received several medals, decorations, and awards, including the Meritorious Service Medal, the Joint Service Commendation Medal, two Army Commendation Medals, two Army Achievement Medals, the Army Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal with two Bronze Service Stars, and two Armed Forces Reserve Medals with "M" device.

Those who knew him will remember Master Sergeant Bruner—or, as friends called him, "Tommy"—as a family man. "Family was first to him," says his brother, Robert Bruner. "It was all the time family, family, family, everywhere he went."

He was devoted to his wife Jane Bruner, to whom he was married for 27 years. They met in a club where she served bar. Night after night, he would walk in and notice her. Jane was skeptical at first, but eventually Tommy convinced one of her friends to trick Jane into going out with him after the club closed. "He spoiled me rotten," Jane recalls. "He would do everything for me. He was my everything . . . my life."

Jane's two sons, Tom-Tom and Brian Sanefur, became Tommy's stepsons, and he loved them like his own. "He was always there," Brian remembers. "He was a good father, husband, and friend."

Perhaps even better than fatherhood was grandfatherhood. Tommy had three grandkids—T.J., Jacob, and "Baby" Grace—and loved playing with them. "He lived for those grandkids," Jane says. She remembers how it was not uncommon for Tommy to crawl down on the floor with them and watch cartoon after cartoon.

The most exciting holiday in the Bruner household was Christmas because Tommy outdid everyone on decorations. He was able to spend each Christmas at home. "He had reindeer, he had lights, a snowman, a sled," Jane recalls. "We've always had big Christmases." While serving in Afghanistan, Tommy even told Jane that he had gone to a bazaar there and done some Christmas shopping for her and the children.

Soon before his passing, Tommy and Jane built a new house together in Owensboro, and Tommy helped pick

out the colors. The couple saved up their money until they could build a home of their dreams. Jane has planted a white dogwood tree now at the house in Tommy's memory.

In that house, Tommy turned the garage into what Jane calls his "war room," where he put up pictures of battles from the Revolutionary War to Operation Enduring Freedom. It was his little getaway, and Jane has left it just as it was.

Tommy was a veteran soldier, having served on Active Duty from 1975 to 1979 and then joined the Army Reserves in 1981. He volunteered to serve in Afghanistan because he wanted to help train the younger soldiers and was deployed with Headquarters, 2nd Brigade, 100th Division, U.S. Army Reserve, based out of Owensboro, KY. "He wanted to go, and I said, 'There's no way I'm going to stop you from doing what you want to do,'" Jane says. "He was just a soldier doing his job, and he loved it."

Jane also recalls that Tommy said he loved it in Afghanistan. He thought the country was beautiful, and he was trying to learn the language. He told Jane the mission in Afghanistan was the highlight of his career.

Patrick Rowe, the training coordinator at the Owensboro Army Reserve Center, recalls Tommy's bond with his fellow soldiers. "He knew his guys," Patrick said. "You could ask him anything about anybody."

At home, Tommy attended Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and worked as manager at the Don Moore Auto Mall. They appreciated him there because he was "so picky," Jane says. He paid attention to every detail. He had been planning to retire after his latest tour, but Jane thinks he still would have worked there to give himself something to do.

Tommy died of a heart attack while serving his country in Afghanistan. Jane knew something was wrong because Tommy called her every day, until one day he did not call.

Our thoughts are with his many loved ones after such a loss. We are thinking of his wife Jane; his stepsons, Tom and Brian Sanefur; his mother Martha; his grandmother Virginia; his grandchildren, T.J., Jacob, and Grace Sanefur; his brother Robert; and many other beloved friends and family members.

Jane received an insurance settlement after Tommy died. She decided she already had everything she wanted, so she gave the money to the grandchildren. "It is what he would have wanted," Jane said.

I express my deepest sympathies to Jane Bruner and to all of her and Tommy's family. I would like them to know this Senate honors MSG Thomas L. Bruner's great devotion and his sacrifice, and we offer our deepest gratitude to him and his family for all they have given our Nation.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.