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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ROLAND W. BURRIS, a Senator from the State of Illinois.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our help in ages past and our hope for years to come, thank You for the demonstrated durability of our governmental institutions and for those who serve You faithfully by preserving our freedom. Bless our Senators as they strive to do Your will.

Lord, manifest Your presence and power in their daily work so that they will not become weary in doing good. Move them toward the deeper dedication and the higher purpose of providing hope for the marginalized in our world. Show them what they can do to bring about the moral and spiritual renewal of this Nation in order to hasten the coming day of justice and peace in our world. We pray in the Name of the King of Kings. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable ROLAND BURRIS 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, July 14, 2009.

To the Senate:

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

appoint the Honorable ROLAND BURRIS, a Senator from the State of Illinois, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. BURRIS 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 remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes each. The majority will control the first 30 minutes, the Republicans will control the final 30 minutes. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the Department of Defense authorization bill.

Pending is an amendment dealing with the airplane, the F-22. That amendment has been offered by Senators LEVIN and MCCAIN, the two managers of this bill. The President has indicated if the F-22 language stays in the bill, he will veto it.

A decision has to be made today as to how we are going to dispose of this amendment, either by passing it or by moving beyond it in some way. We will recess today from 12:30 until 2:15 to allow for the weekly policy lunches.

There will be no rollcall votes after 2 or 2:30 today.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I think nearly every one of us has gone to the doctor and taken home advice to help us get better or to live healthier. Maybe at one point in our lives, we were told, for example, to exercise more. Maybe we were told to cut some-

thing out of our diet, lose some weight, add something to it, gain some weight, change your diet in some way.

Maybe we were prescribed medication for a short while or for a long while. People within the sound of my voice in this Senate Chamber all have been to doctors, and many are taking medicine now. It is not always easy to hear the advice doctors give or to follow the advice they give. It is never easy to change your lifestyle, even if you know you will be better in the long run.

But you also know the risk of not following your doctor's orders and the consequences of not taking your medicine. The costs of doing nothing are far greater. You know that if you do not do something this time, the news after your next checkup may even be worse; it will take even more drastic steps or more difficult changes to get healthy again.

Well, America has had its checkup, and the prognosis is not promising. Our health care system is sick. It is not healthy. Our doctor's orders are very clear: If we do not start taking better care of ourselves, it is only going to get worse. This is the message America has.

The costs of health care today are staggering. Families in every part of Nevada and in every State feel this every day. But the costs could get much higher. If we do not act, they will get worse, much worse, much higher.

If we do not act, they will get higher.

The average American family today pays twice as much for its health care than it did a decade ago. If we do not act, less than a decade from now those costs will double again. Families are not making more money, but they are paying more trying to get healthy and to stay healthy. If we do not act, less than a decade from now you will spend almost half your family's income on health care. No one can be expected to afford that. No one should have to afford 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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After a while, the trillions of dollars millions of families spend start to add up. Our country spends on health care twice as much per person than any other developed nation on the planet. Health care costs consume almost 20 cents of every dollar we spend. That is of every dollar spent in America. If we do not act, in a generation it will consume more than one-third of every dollar.

You may be fortunate enough to afford health care this year, but if we do not act, you may not be able to say the same next year. If we do not act, your children will likely not be able to say the same when they grow up.

Last Thursday, I was in an event with Senator MURRAY, where she got notice from the State of Washington that 135,000 people who are beneficiaries of a health insurance plan in her State got a notice that the average rate of increase to the 135,000 recipients of health care in that plan will have an increase on an average of 17.5 percent.

Staggering. We have all read the charts and seen the numbers repeated by those who oppose fixing our broken health care system. There are charts and there are conversations all toward maintaining the status quo, keeping things the way they are. But it is as if they have not bothered to do the math on the costs of doing nothing.

Health care reform is economic reform. That is why we want to lower skyrocketing costs and bring stability and security back to health care. That is why we are committed to passing a plan that protects what works and fixes what does not. I am encouraged by the cooperation and commitment of several Republican Senators willing to work with us to get that done and to get it done before it is too late.

I appreciate the tireless work of our Finance and HELP Committees, Democrats and Republicans, as they write a prescription for America that will work. I had a call last night about 10 from CHRIS DODD, indicating the progress that has been made in the HELP Committee.

Republicans have offered hundreds of amendments—hundreds of amendments—and they are working their way through those. Those Republican amendments sometimes improve the legislation. For example, Senator DODD said he was very pleased they were able to work something out on biogenetics—that is a prescription physicians get—and there is some real activity out there as to how that is going to be treated.

An amendment offered by Senator HATCH was adopted by the committee. I appreciate the work of our Finance and HELP Committees as they write a prescription for America that will work.

I still aim to bring the bill to the floor this month, but it appears somewhat to ignore the doctor's orders. I wish I could say they do so at their own peril. Yet if a handful of Senators stand in the way of the change we so drastically need, urgently need, they

will endanger not just them but all of us. They will endanger families of every background, businesses of every size, and our Nation's collective future.

We have already seen what happens when we do nothing. Over the past 8 years of inaction, the cost of health care rose to record levels, and the number of Americans who cannot afford insurance did the same. Senator PATTY MURRAY's story is certainly relevant. For the 135,000 people in the State of Washington, a 17.5-percent increase, on average, of their policies, is what they have to pay.

For the millions of families who file for foreclosure because they cannot afford both their house and health care, not acting is not an option. For the millions of Americans who file for bankruptcy because their medical bills grow higher and higher and higher, not acting is not an option. For the millions of Americans who have skipped a doctor's visit or treatments they need to stay healthy or who never fill a prescription their doctor gives them because health care is simply too expensive, not acting is not an option.

Our health care system is not healthy. Americans' physical health and America's fiscal health are at stake, and not acting is not an option.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HEALTH CARE WEEK VI, DAY II

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as both parties work together on reforming health care, Americans have been clear about what they want to see in a result. Americans want health care that is more affordable and accessible, but they also want to preserve the choice and quality that our current system provides.

We also know what Americans do not want. They do not want a government plan that forces them off their current insurance; denies, delays, and rations care; or costs trillions of dollars, only to leave millions of Americans with worse health care than they currently have.

And Americans certainly do not want us to throw together some patchwork plan that nobody has had a chance to look at, and then rush it out the door the way the stimulus bill was, just so politicians in Washington can say they accomplished something.

Americans are increasingly concerned about some of the proposals coming out of Washington, and they are concerned about the cost, about who gets stuck with the bill.

And they are concerned for good reason.

All the cost estimates we have seen for Democrat reform proposals have been staggering, and most of them only hint at what the true cost of these changes might be.

Moreover, some estimates claim to cover a 10-year period but actually only cover a 6 year period.

We also know from hard experience with programs like Medicare and Medicaid that government-run health plans are likely to cost far more in the long run than original estimates suggest.

And we have seen that with the current administration initial estimates and assurances are not always on target. Earlier this year, the Administration predicted the stimulus bill would keep unemployment below 8 percent. It is now approaching 10 percent.

So Americans are increasingly concerned about cost. This is why the advocates of government-run health care are scrambling for a way to pay for it. But in their rush to find the money, they have come up with some terrible ideas, such as forcing small business owners and seniors to pick up the tab through higher taxes and cuts to Medicare.

Let me repeat that: the advocates for government-run health care now want small business owners and seniors to pay for their plan through higher taxes and cuts to Medicare. This is exactly the wrong approach. Raiding one insolvent government-run program to create another is not reform. It is using old ideas to solve a problem that calls for fresh thinking. Medicare should be strengthened for future generations, not used as a piggy bank to fund more government programs.

As for tax hikes on small business owners, this is the last thing we should be doing to the people who have created approximately two-thirds of America's jobs over the past decade at a time when the unemployment rate is approaching 10 percent. According to the President of the National Federation of Independent Business, some proposals currently being considered in Congress could kill more than 1.5 million jobs. And there is strong evidence that low-wage workers, minorities, and women would be hardest hit. In the middle of a recession, we should be looking for ways to create jobs, not destroy them. We should be looking for ways to help workers, not hurt them.

Americans want health care reform. But they do not want so-called reforms that could cost trillions of dollars, that could increase insurance premiums, or that could cause millions to end up with worse care than they now have. And they certainly do not want a slapped-together plan that's paid for on the backs of seniors and small business owners.

Instead, Americans want us to work together on proposals that are likely to garner strong bipartisan support. I have listed many of these proposals repeatedly over the past several weeks, such as reforming medical malpractice laws to get rid of junk lawsuits and bring down costs, and encouraging wellness and prevention programs such as those that help people quit smoking and overcome obesity, programs that have already been shown to cut costs.