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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Spirit of God, descend upon our hearts and bless the Members of this body in their ministry of legislative work. Give them the ethical and spiritual insight to see beyond the faulty and superficial so that they will accomplish Your will on Earth. Lord, turn their weights into wings by increasing their strength and gladdening their spirit. Open doors of opportunity for them to render service that will empower the powerless and unshackle the oppressed. Make them eager to extend the helping hand of kindness and friendship that will send rays of hope far down the future's broadening way. Give them Your wisdom to make creative decisions and Your power to offset the pressures of the demanding life they are called to live.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable TOM UDALL 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, July 22, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico 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 resume consideration of the Department of Defense authorization bill. The time until 12 is for debate on the Thune amendment, with the time equally divided and controlled between Senators THUNE and DURBIN or their designees. At 12 today, the Senate will proceed to a rollcall vote in relation to the Thune amendment. Under an agreement reached a couple of days ago, there will be 60 affirmative votes required for the adoption of the amendment.

As a reminder to all Senators, there will be a live quorum at 2 p.m. today for the Court of Impeachment of Samuel Kent. Senators should be in the Chamber at that time. There will be a delegation from the House that will appear at that time.

Additional rollcall votes are expected throughout the afternoon as the Senate considers amendments to the Defense authorization bill. Yesterday, the managers, Senators LEVIN and MCCAIN, asked for an 11 a.m. filing deadline for first-degree amendments. We hope this will be accomplished with a consent agreement this morning.

I will later today meet with the distinguished Republican leader and make some decisions as to how we will finish our work the rest of this week and the next 2 weeks and to find out if we will have to work any weekends. We have a number of things we are required to do. I gave the Republican leader last week an idea of what I think we need to accomplish. Without going into detail now, I will be meeting with him later to see if we can figure out a way to do it as easily as possible. We have two weekends until the August recess. I hope it is not necessary that we work weekends, but it is certainly possible. I hope we can end when we need to end. We have some things we have to do before we leave. I hope that can be accomplished. I am confident that with some cooperation it can.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the choices in this health care debate should be about which ideas contain the best solutions to fix a severely broken system. The choices in this health care debate should be about how best to lower costs while increasing quality of care and how best to bring security and stability back to health care. The choices in this health care debate should be about how to make it easier to stay healthy. But for some, the choice seems to be whether we should do anything, whether to act at all. This is a false choice. That is not a choice we have. Not acting is not an option.

A week or so ago, the Republican leader in the House of Representatives said:

I think we all understand that we've got the best health care system in the world.

Unlike the vast majority of Americans, he seems pretty content with the status quo.

Just this week, the junior Senator from South Carolina said that we just need to "get out of the way and allow the market to work." In other words,

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



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he says: Let's do nothing. Let's repeat the same mistakes of the past and dig ourselves deeper and deeper into this hole the Obama administration inherited.

That is not responsible and is not legislating. That approach does nothing to help the millions of Americans who live just one accident, one illness, or one pink slip away from losing their health coverage. That posture certainly does nothing to help the millions of Americans who have no health insurance to begin with. If we just get out of the way, as the Senator suggests, health care costs will get higher and more people who have health care this year will not be able to say the same next year. Today, 14,000 people in America will lose their health insurance. Yesterday, 14,000 people already lost their health insurance. Tomorrow, 14,000 people will lose their health insurance. No weekends off, no holidays—14,000, 7 days a week.

If we let the market work its will, as the Senator suggests, less than a decade from now you will have to spend almost half of the family's income on health care. That is not sustainable. If we sit this one out, as the Senator suggests, more parents will decide they can't take their children to the doctor when they are hurt or sick because it simply costs too much to pay the medical bills, and more small businesses will lay off more of their workers because it simply costs too much to give them health coverage. If, as the Senator suggests, we do nothing, we will keep our economy from recovering, keep businesses from growing, and keep families from getting the doctor visits and medicine they need to stay healthy. Allowing the market to work is code for letting the greedy insurance companies, companies that care more about profits than people, continue to deny coverage because one has a pre-existing condition or they have gotten a little too old or maybe they have even changed jobs.

We have already seen what happens when we do nothing. Over the past 8 years of inaction, the costs of health care rose to record levels and the number of Americans who cannot afford insurance did the same. Right now in Nevada, far more than 100,000 people already lack coverage, the coverage they need to have adequate care when they get sick or hurt. We can't afford to treat these people in emergency rooms, which is where the uninsured go for treatment. That is the only place they can go in many instances. If we don't act, many more Nevadans will lose their coverage and many around America will also lose their coverage.

There are a lot of good ideas about how to fix the health care system in America. At this critical time for our economy's health and our citizens' health, it is important we exhaustively determine what those changes should be. The question is not whether we should explore any of them; our job is to determine which of these paths will

lead us back to recovery, prosperity, and good health.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HEALTH CARE WEEK VII, DAY II

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, the President, to his credit, acknowledged what the American people have been telling us for weeks: that the Democratic health care proposals currently making their way through Congress aren't where they need to be. I couldn't agree with him more.

All of us recognize the need for reform. That is not in question. And that is why day after day, I have come to the floor of the Senate and proposed concrete, commonsense reforms that all of us can agree on, reforms that would increase access, decrease costs, and guarantee that no one in this country would be forced to give up the care they currently have.

As I have said repeatedly, we should reform malpractice laws; encourage wellness and prevention programs that encourage healthier lifestyles like quitting smoking and fighting obesity; promote more competition in the private insurance market; and address the needs of small businesses in a way that doesn't kill jobs in the middle of a recession.

Unfortunately, the administration seems bent on its own proposal for a government-driven plan that costs trillions of dollars and asks small businesses and seniors to pay for it.

Once this plan is implemented, the American people could be left with a system that none of them would recognize and that most of them would regret—a system in which health care is denied, delayed, and rationed, a system which delivers worse care than Americans currently receive at an even higher cost. Americans want reform. But they don't want this. And they don't want either of the two proposals we have seen so far.

Both proposals could lead to a government takeover of health care, increase long-term health care costs, and cost trillions of dollars—on the backs of seniors, small businesses, and by adding hundreds of billions of dollars to the already-staggering national debt.

The President has said that both of these bills need work. And in my view, Democrats in Congress should listen to the President and come up with something Americans really want. This may take time. But Americans would rather that we get these reforms right than just get them written. When it comes to health care, Americans are sending a clear message: slow down and get it right. It is a message many of us have been delivering for weeks, and it is a message one of the Senate's top Demo-

crats in the health care debate seemed to echo yesterday when he said that the critical test isn't whether we meet a certain deadline but whether we get this reform right, whether it stands the test of history.

We know Americans reject an artificial deadline on closing Guantanamo without a plan on what to do to keep us safe from the detainees who are housed there. And they regret accepting a rushed and artificial deadline on the stimulus. Health care is simply too important to rush, just to meet a date someone picked out of the air.

The arguments we have heard in favor of rushing just don't square with reality.

The administration and some in Congress say that we have to pass these bills right away because rising health care costs are an imminent threat to the economy. Yet the Democrat plans we have seen so far would make the problem worse. According to the independent Congressional Budget Office, the Democrat proposals would very likely increase overall health care spending, not reduce it. There goes that argument.

Others say we need to pass these bills right away because people can't live under the current system a day longer. Yet many of the proposals we have seen wouldn't even go into effect for at least another four years. There goes that argument.

Some say that under the proposals we have seen Americans won't lose the coverage they have. Yet independent studies show that millions would be pushed off plans they currently have and like. There goes that argument too.

The only possible explanation for passing a bill in 2 weeks that could hand over one-sixth of the U.S. economy to the government is that the longer this plan sits out in the open, the more Americans oppose it. Already, Americans are shocked at the idea of funding a government takeover of health care on the backs of seniors through cuts to Medicare or through taxes on small businesses in the middle of a recession. They are shocked to hear that the final proposal could force taxpayers to fund abortions. They have serious concerns about adding to the national debt. And they are worried about the prospect of being forced off the plans they currently have. These concerns are serious. They should be taken seriously, not brushed aside in the service of some artificial deadline.

No one in Washington wants to block health care reform. But many of us do want to take the time that is needed to deliver the kinds of reform that Americans actually want, not a so-called reform that leads to a government takeover of health care that leaves people paying more for worse care than they currently have.

The President was right. The proposals we have seen are not where they need to be—not even close. But that does not mean reform is not possible,