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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.

Holy God, sustainer of humanity, if it were not for Your love, our burdens would be too heavy and the journey would seem too difficult. But because of Your mercies, we can mount up on wings like eagles, run and not become weary, and walk and not faint.

Draw near to our Senators today. Keep them from confusion and perplexity and the fatigue of fruitless quests. Breathe upon their thinking with Your truth and illuminate their understanding with Your light. May the pressures of the world not mold them, but may they receive Your strength so that they can shape our Nation and world according to Your purposes. Lord, maintain in them the fidelity of those to whom much has been given and from whom much will be required. May this be for them a productive day because they have placed their trust in Your strong and guiding hand.

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, September 16, 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 be in a period for the transaction of morning business until 11 a.m. Morning business will need to cease at 11 a.m. because we have Senator COBURN coming to give a statement at that time, preparatory to a vote that will occur after he completes his remarks. Senators will be permitted during the time until 11 o'clock to speak for up to 10 minutes each. The Republicans will control the first half of that time, the majority will control the next half, and the remaining time will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3288, the Transportation appropriations bill. There will be 30 minutes for Senator COBURN and 10 minutes for Senator MURRAY to debate the pending Coburn amendments. Upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate will proceed to a series of up to five rollcall votes. Therefore, Senators should expect votes beginning around 11:30 a.m. Senator COBURN may not use

all of his time. If that is the case, when he completes his remarks, Senator MURRAY or someone she chooses will speak and then we will start the votes.

Last night, I filed cloture on the committee amendment and the underlying bill. I am confident and hopeful that is not going to be necessary, as I am told we should be able to complete action on this bill today. As a result, there will be a 1 p.m. filing deadline for first-degree amendments to this Transportation bill. We hope we can move immediately to the Interior appropriations bill. We should be able to wrap that up fairly quickly.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the debate over health care continues to be a top concern for most Americans, but it is important to realize that this debate is not taking place in a vacuum. It is taking place in the context of a nation that is increasingly concerned about the size and the scope of government.

Over the past year, Americans have seen the government take over automakers and insurance companies. They have seen government spend hundreds of billions of dollars to bail out banks and other financial institutions. They have seen government run up unprecedented debt. And now they are seeing the government trying to take over health care.

If the White House wants an explanation for all the unrest it is witnessing across the country, all the worry and concerns Americans have about their health care plans, this is a crucial piece. Democrats in Washington may see all these government

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



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programs and interventions as separate, individual events. But to most Americans who are weathering a recession, it seems as if every time they pick up a newspaper or turn on the television, Democrats in Washington are pushing another trillion-dollar bill, calling for more spending, more taxes, and more debt. That is why people are becoming more vocal, and that is why they have been delivering a consistent message for weeks: no more government takeovers, no more spending money we do not have, no more tax increases, and no more debt. Americans are concerned about government running their lives and ruining their livelihoods, and they do not get the sense that either the administration or Democrats on Capitol Hill are listening.

Nowhere is this disconnect between the people and the politicians in Washington more apparent than in the debate over health care. Americans do not think a bigger role for government in health care would improve the system. Yet despite this, every single proposal we have seen would lead to a vast expansion of the government's role in the health care system.

It is not that the Democrats in Congress do not sense the public's unease about a new government plan for health care. I think they do. It is the primary reason some of them are backing away from proposals that include it. What some Americans do not realize, however, is that even without a government plan, the health care plans Democrats are proposing would still vastly expand the government's role in our health care. That is what I would like to discuss in a little more detail this morning.

Let me list just a few examples of how government's role in health care would expand even without a government-run plan.

Even without a government plan, the proposals we have seen would force employers to pay a tax if they cannot afford insurance for their employees. Employers have warned that this provision would kill jobs. At a time when the Nation's unemployment rate stands at a 25-year high of 9.7 percent, we should help businesses create jobs not kill them.

Even without a government plan, these proposals would require all Americans to choose only from health insurance plans with standards set by the government and would let government bureaucrats dictate what benefits are available to families. On this point, Americans have been equally clear. People want more choice and competition in the health care market so they can pick a plan that will work for their family, not one dictated by politicians in Washington. Yet even without a government plan, that is what they would get under the proposals we have seen. Anyone who saw any of the townhall meetings last month knows this idea is about as popular as chicken pox.

Even without a government plan, these health care proposals would re-

quire States to expand their Medicaid Programs, something the Senator from Tennessee, who is here on the floor, has spoken about frequently. Governors from both political parties have expressed serious concerns about the effect this particular proposal would have on their State budgets. They think these kinds of decisions should be left up to them, the States, not the Federal Government, and, frankly, so do most Americans.

Even without a government plan, these health care proposals would impose new taxes on small businesses and on individuals. Under the House bill, for example, taxes on some small businesses could rise as high as roughly 45 percent, a rate that is approximately 30 percent higher than the rate for big corporations. Under the same House bill, the average combined Federal and State top tax rate for some individuals would be about 52 percent—more than half of their paychecks.

Finally, the President has said his plan will not require any Americans to give up the health insurance they have and like. But what about the 11 million seniors who are currently enrolled in Medicare Advantage? Nearly 90 percent of them say they are satisfied with it. This program has given seniors more options and more choices when it comes to their health care. Yet under the administration's plan the government would make massive cuts to Medicare Advantage, forcing some seniors off this plan that so many of them have and like. When it comes to Medicare Advantage, Democratic rhetoric just does not square with reality.

Let me sum it up. While getting rid of the government plan would be a good start, the Democratic bills we have seen would still grant the government far too much control over the health care system.

Over the past few months, Americans have been saying they have had enough of spending, enough of debt, and enough of government expansion. How are the Democrats in Washington responding? By trying to rush through another trillion-dollar bill Americans do not even want and cannot afford.

The American people do want health care reform—not with more government but with less. They do not want a new government-run system; they want us to repair the system we have.

On all of these points, the American people are sending a clear and persistent message. It is time we in Congress started to listen.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period for the

transaction of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes, the majority controlling the next 30 minutes, and the remaining time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I congratulate the Republican leader, the Senator from Kentucky, on his remarks. He made it very clear that we on the Republican side of the aisle want health care reform, but our definition of that is a little different from that on the other side of the aisle. We want health care reform that reduces costs—costs to the American people when they buy health insurance and the costs of the government of the American people. We do not want more debt and another Washington takeover, which we are seeing so much of these days.

President Obama said in his address to us that he “will not sign a plan that adds one dime to our deficits—either now or in the future. Period.” That is good.

As David Brooks wrote in the *New York Times* this past Friday:

This sound bite [of the President] kills the House health care bill.

It kills the House health care bill, because it would add \$220 billion to the deficit over the first 10 years of its operation and another \$1 trillion over the next 10 years after that.

The President's sound bite about the deficit would effectively knock out the bill passed by the Senate HELP Committee as well. According to a recent letter from the Congressional Budget Office to the ranking member of the Senate HELP Committee, Senator ENZI of Wyoming:

The 10-year cost of the coverage expansion [of that bill] to the Federal Government, including such a change in Medicaid eligibility, would probably exceed \$1 trillion.

So that is off the table.

There appears to be growing bipartisan concern about a health care bill that might add to the debt. Senator WARNER of Virginia said on Monday:

My feeling is, [health care reform] can't just be paid for in a 10-year window. It has to be paid for in the out years as well.

That is Washington-speak for over the long term. He says:

This is so much bigger than health care. It goes to the deficit. It goes right to the heart of our competitiveness.

That is Senator WARNER of Virginia. I couldn't agree more. All of the health care reform bills produced so far by the Democratic Congress—either in the Senate or in the House—flunk the first test, which is reducing cost—cost to the American people and cost to the American government.

In July, the Congressional Budget Office Director, Douglas Elmendorf, said