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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, our Father, we thank You for the gifts You generously give to humanity. We are grateful for the loveliness of Earth and sea and sky. Thank You for great music to hear and for great books of prose and poetry to read. Thank You for minds to think, for hands to labor, and for hearts to love.

Lord, we praise You for the abilities You have given our Senators and for their willingness to serve You and country. Teach them Your lessons; show them Your way. Make them Your instruments of a durable peace, just to all nations and hopeful for all humanity. As they work today, let their words, thoughts, and actions reflect the content of Your character.

We pray in Your Holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, 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, October 1, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND 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. Madam President, following the remarks of the leaders, there will be a period of morning business for 90 minutes. The majority will control the first half and the Republicans will control the final half. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the Defense appropriations bill. Last night, cloture was filed on the committee-reported substitute amendment. As a result, the filing deadline for first-degree amendments is 1 p.m. today. Senators should expect rollcall votes to occur throughout the day as we work through amendments to this bill.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

McCHRISTAL AMENDMENT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, as the Senate fulfills its constitutional

duty this week of providing for the common defense, it will also have an opportunity to fulfill its oversight responsibilities in the global war on terror and, more specifically, in the crucial theater of Afghanistan. Later today, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator MCCAIN, will offer an amendment to the Defense appropriations bill that calls on our top commander in Afghanistan, GEN Stanley McChrystal, and the Centcom Commander GEN David Petraeus, to come to Washington to explain to Congress and the American people why they believe the situation in Afghanistan is so perilous, what they believe is necessary for our success, and why.

There is recent precedent for this. Many Americans will recall that 2 years ago, in accordance with a requirement contained in another Defense appropriations bill, GEN David Petraeus came to Washington to explain what had gone wrong in Iraq and what he and the rest of our forces were doing to turn things around. By providing a sober assessment of the situation that cut through the political cross-currents of the moment, General Petraeus's testimony, along with that of Ambassador Ryan Crocker, focused the national debate. It left us newly confident in their ability to lead us in Iraq. And it set us on a path of progress that continues today.

No one is arguing that the two situations are identical. They are clearly not. But it is hard to deny the urgency of the assessment that General McChrystal sent to the White House in late August, parts of which have been made public. And it is impossible to ignore his depiction of a grave and deteriorating situation on the very soil where al-Qaida terrorists plotted the 9/11 attacks. General McChrystal's assessment of the worsening situation in Afghanistan should be of concern to all of us, particularly its account of a resurgent Taliban and a resilient al-

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



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Qaida. As the President told a Turkish audience in April, "The world has come too far to let this region backslide, and to let al Qaeda terrorists plot further attacks."

But there is also reason to be confident. At a time of worsening violence in Iraq, America was fortunate to be able to turn to General Petraeus, the man who literally wrote the book on counterinsurgency. And now, at a time of worsening violence in Afghanistan, we are just as fortunate to be able to turn to General McChrystal, who in reported previous combat experience supervised, planned, and executed counterterrorism operations.

No one is better equipped to assess the situation on the ground—and whether it calls for a new counterinsurgency strategy, or for a continuation of the same kind of counterterrorism strategy which the previous administration pursued, and which the current Vice President is reportedly urging the current administration to embrace.

Earlier this year, President Obama expressed his confidence in General McChrystal by appointing him to his current mission. Following the President's lead, the Senate expressed its confidence in General McChrystal by confirming him for his current mission without dissent. Now it is time for Congress and the President to work together on a plan for success.

Since no strategy will succeed without the support of the public, the President will doubtlessly want to explain to the American people why he plans to accept or reject the McChrystal Plan. This is especially true of a counterinsurgency strategy, which, by definition, requires a large commitment of troops and resources and great endurance on the part of the Armed Forces and the public alike.

Congress, for its part, has a responsibility to fund and to oversee our armed forces. Part of that is ensuring that we have the best information possible, and that we make that information available to the American people. And that is why it is crucial that we have an opportunity to hear General McChrystal's personal assessment of the mission that we confirmed him for, and that we give him an opportunity to explain why he has concluded that more troops are needed to avoid failure in Afghanistan.

General Petraeus's testimony served a necessary purpose during an earlier debate over strategy. General McChrystal's will do the same in this one.

We know he would be a willing witness. General McChrystal has spoken freely about his assessment on network television. And he recently told a visitor to Afghanistan that, if asked, he would welcome the opportunity to come to Washington to make the case for additional troops. He also said that it is his sacred duty to provide the unvarnished truth. With today's vote—which I urge our friends on the other

side of the aisle to support—the Senate will give him a chance to do both.

HEALTH CARE WEEK XI, DAY II

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, Americans have been watching the health care debate play out in various committees in Congress, and they are wondering where it's all headed. I will make it easy for them. The final bill is going to cost about a trillion dollars. It is going to include \$½ trillion in cuts to seniors' Medicare in order to create a new government program. It is going to raise hundreds of billions of dollars in taxes on individuals and businesses. And it is going to expand the government's role in the health care of every single American, whether they like it or not, limiting choices and leading to the same kind of denial and delay we have seen in other countries.

And then there is the issue of rushing through a bill and denying the American people the chance to read it. Imagine that, a trillion dollars out of the taxpayers' wallets for a bill that will affect the health care of every single American, and the majority has already voted to deny a mere 72-hours of public review before voting on it. This is outrageous, and hopefully this is not the way the majority decides to go forward.

One group that has become increasingly vocal in its criticism of this legislation is our Nation's Governors. Over the course of this debate, at least one in three of them have issued statements expressing their urgent concerns about a proposed expansion of Medicaid, which will force them either to cut services, raise taxes, or both. That is on top of the tax hikes that come about on the Federal level as a result of this bill.

One Democrat Governor had this to say of the Medicaid proposal: ". . . it's very scary for governors to be saying as soon as the revenues get back there, the Federal Government is going to come in and say here's how you're going to spend your new money."

Governor Schwarzenegger of California says he won't support Federal health care reform proposals that impose billions of dollars in new costs on California.

Governor Crist of Florida says the proposed Medicaid expansion would have a crippling effect on Florida's State economy.

Governor Linda Lingle of Hawaii says the proposed Medicaid expansion would be tantamount to mandating a tax increase on every resident of Hawaii . . . and further harm residents who are struggling to make ends meet.

Idaho Governor "Butch" Otter calls the proposal "an . . . irresponsible effort to shift a substantial and unmanageable financial burden to the states."

Those are just a few of the comments we have heard from Governors. They are issuing the same kind of dire warnings about the proposed health care legislation that Americans have been sounding for months.

The fact is, supporters of this legislation know that most Americans oppose it. That is why they are not listening. And that is why they are trying to rush it through without giving anybody a chance to study the details. The American people understand these proposals. They understand the strategy. And they are not happy about either.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to a period of morning business for 90 minutes, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the second half.

The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, a week ago, freshman Democratic Senators came to this floor to discuss as a group how our current health care system is broken and unsustainable. Today, we return to address the challenge of runaway costs and how health care reform can bend the cost curve, making health care more affordable and more accessible to our families and our businesses.

Many folks have said to me: Is this really the time to take on health care reform, when we are in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression? The answer is an unequivocal yes. Now is the time. Now is the time because health care costs are a runaway train that can do great damage to our families and our small businesses and large businesses. Indeed, consider the situation of a family when health care costs have doubled in the last 9 years, so families who could afford insurance just a few years ago cannot afford it today. Now health care premiums are rising even faster. They are expected to double in the next 7 years. As a result, many families and many individuals who are struggling to pay those health care premiums right now won't be able to do so in just a few more years. So fixing our broken health care system cannot wait. Indeed, reform is essential to our families, our small businesses, and our large businesses.

Consider this: For a working family, every additional dollar that goes into a health care premium comes out of the wages that would otherwise go to increase the family's purchasing power.