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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JEFF MERKLEY, a Senator from the State of Oregon.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious God, our shelter in the time of storm, hold our Senators within Your providential hand, guiding them from perplexity to wisdom. Give them strength to overcome the challenges they face, enabling them to be true guardians of liberty. Lord, keep them faithful in service, inspired by the knowledge that in due season they will reap if they persevere. Give them a vision greater than they possess that they may see clearly what You want them to accomplish. Infuse them with the faith to realize that with You all things are possible.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JEFF MERKLEY 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, March 9, 2010.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JEFF MERKLEY, a Sen-

ator from the State of Oregon, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MERKLEY 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 turn to a period of morning business until 11 o'clock this morning. Senators during that time will be able to speak for up to 10 minutes each. The Republicans will control the first half and the majority will control the second half. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 4213, the tax extenders bill. There will then be a series of up to four rollcall votes in relation to amendments to the bill. Those votes will start at 11 o'clock. Following the series of votes, the Senate will recess until 2:15 p.m. in order to accommodate the weekly caucus meetings. At 2:30 p.m., the Senate will proceed to a cloture vote on the substitute amendment. As a reminder, the filing deadline for second-degree amendments is 12 o'clock noon today.

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 has been going on for a long time now. It is easy to

lose sight of where we started, so I would just like to remind people today of what this debate was supposed to be about.

It was supposed to be about cost. This debate was supposed to be about bringing the cost of health care down, about keeping health care costs from bankrupting families and government. So if you are looking for a reason as to why Americans overwhelmingly oppose this bill and why Democrats are having such a hard time rounding up votes within their own party for this bill, it is because no one believes this bill will lower the cost of health care. It is that simple.

When you hear people talk about the cost of health care, they usually are referring to three things: the overall health care expenses Americans will have to shoulder if this bill passes, overall spending by the Federal Government on health care if this bill passes, and the amount of money people will have to spend on health insurance premiums if this bill passes. On all three counts, the bill the White House and its allies in Congress want us to vote for would drive costs up actually. The administration's own scorekeeper at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services says overall health spending will go up by more than \$200 billion under this bill—overall health care spending up \$200 billion under this bill, according to the administration. The independent Congressional Budget Office says Federal spending on health care will increase by about \$200 billion over the next 10 years. CBO also says health insurance premiums for millions of Americans across the country will go up 10 to 13 percent as a result of all the new government mandates contained in this bill—and continue to rise at the current unsustainable rate for nearly everyone else, despite more than \$2 trillion in new government spending.

Another thing Americans are rightly concerned about is the debt. It is completely out of control. Some say this

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



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bill lowers the debt, but let me remind my colleagues that the extenders bill we will be voting on today—the bill we will be voting on today—will add more to the debt than even the White House claims its health spending bill will save. Let me say that again. The bill we are going to pass today, the extenders bill, will add more to the debt—will add more to the debt—than even the White House claims its health spending bill will save.

So if cost is what you are concerned about, then you cannot vote for this bill. It is that simple. Americans have it figured out, and that is why they are asking themselves why anyone in Congress would even think about voting for this bill. This should not even be a tough call.

Let's start over and work together on a step-by-step solutions process that focuses on cost, that actually lowers costs, not the other way around. Let's put together a bill Americans will support.

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, there will now be a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders, with the Republicans controlling the first portion and the majority controlling the second portion.

The Senator from Wyoming.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I just heard the Republican leader talk about the issue of health care in America and the goal which we heard so much about of getting the cost of care under control.

I have practiced medicine for 25 years in Casper, WY. I was in Wyoming yesterday visiting with physicians, visiting with nurses, visiting with those who are patients, as well as those who are providers, and talking with them about what is happening in this country and in this body with the discussion about health care in America and the legislation. No matter whom I talk with in Wyoming, when they look at this massive, 2,000-page bill and they think about it and then they ask questions about it, they say: How in the world is this actually going to get the cost of care down? How is this going to help them save money? Because as they read it and as they look at the rules and the regulations and the new mandates for more bureaucracies—they say it is going to be more government

employees at a time when there is 10 percent unemployment in the country—they say: It is going to likely cause my own cost of health care to go up, my own insurance coverage to go up. They have great concerns that the quality of their own care will go down—go down. Americans, and certainly the people in Wyoming, are very worried that if this bill becomes law, the cost of their care is going to go up and the quality and availability of their care is going to go down. That is not what they want.

The President was speaking in Philadelphia yesterday. The front page of one of the papers this morning says: "[The President] Turns Up the Volume in Bid for His Health Measure." And he said, as a challenge to Democrats, "If not us, who?"

Mr. President, it should be all of us. This should not be something that is being rammed through the House and the Senate and force-fed to the American people at a time when 75 percent of them want nothing to do with this bill. Three out of four Americans say: Stop, we don't want this, because they are worried about the cost of their own care and the availability and the quality of the care they are receiving.

So when the President gives his speeches, as he did yesterday, I would say: Involve all of us. Involve all of us in the discussion, which is what we should have been doing for over a year.

I look at what he said in his speech, and he talked about an insurance broker who apparently told some others there was so little competition—this is the President now talking, saying there is so little competition in insurance, that allows people to drive up the cost. The solution to that is the Republican solution that says: Increase the competition, increase the competition. That is what we need. Patients, people, citizens of this country want to be able to shop around, buy insurance across State lines, look for what is best for them and best for their families. If we did that, if we did that today, there would be 12 million more Americans with insurance by merely being allowed to have more competition, to be able to shop across State lines and to look around for something that is best for them and for their families—not the limited choices they may have in the State in which they happen to live.

So I look at this from the standpoint of practicing medicine for 25 years, visiting with patients, visiting with providers, talking with nurses, talking with doctors, saying there are things we can do to get down the cost of care. Unfortunately, they are not included in this 2,000-page bill that is now sitting over in the House, with all of these different approaches to force this through in a way that undermines what the American people want, what the American people are asking for—the opinions of the American people—by a group of people in this body who say: We know better than the American people.

This body does not know better than the American people. The House does not know better than the American people. It is time to listen to the American people, which is why I go home every weekend to visit with those folks in my State, in my home State of Wyoming, to visit with them about their needs, their concerns. And they have great concerns about this bill.

It is not just people in my home communities. Warren Buffett, the great investor, says Washington should scrap this health care bill and start over. He said they should focus, as our Republican leader said a few minutes ago, on the costs. He said we should say we are going to focus on the costs and not dream up 2,000 pages of other things. Warren Buffett says get rid of the nonsense, and this bill is loaded with nonsense. This bill is loaded with nonsense—nonsense that is going to drive up the cost of care and decrease the quality of care in this country.

So we have now been going through this for a year. The President is out trying to make an appeal to the Nation to say: Yes, buy this package I am trying to sell. The American people are too smart for that. They realize this package cuts \$500 billion from Medicare patients who depend on Medicare for their health care—\$500 billion in Medicare cuts. Part of it is to hospitals and part of it is to a program called Medicare Advantage. There are 10 million Americans on Medicare Advantage. The reason they signed up for this, they choose this, is because there is an advantage for them as seniors to participate in this program because this is a program that actually works with preventive care, with coordinating care, things that regular Medicare does not do. They are going to cut over \$100 billion from our nursing homes and money from home health, which is a lifeline for people at home. They are going to cut money from hospice for people in their final days of life. That is part of this big bill the President is supporting and that he is asking the House to vote for. It is a bill that raises taxes by another \$500 billion. It is a bill the House is going to be asked to pass that includes every one of the sweetheart deals because their first act in the House is going to have to be to pass the bill the Senate passed on Christmas Eve and that includes all the sweetheart deals, whether it is to Nebraska or Louisiana or Florida. Thirteen different Senators had sweetheart deals put into that bill the Democrats are going to be asked to vote for because the Republicans see through this whole thing.

So the opposition to this is bipartisan. It is bipartisan opposition. Those who support it is one party only.

We are looking now at a mandate where every American is going to be forced—forced—to buy a product, to buy insurance—forced under this—or they will either have to pay special taxes, have their wages garnished or pay a fine or a penalty under this plan