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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 13, 2010, at 2 p.m.

Senate

(Legislative day of Thursday, March 25, 2010)

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, 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.

Eternal and blessed God, amid the earthquakes, wind, and fire of this turbulent world, we thank You for seasonal reminders of new life and resurrection. Give our lawmakers the wisdom to wait until they hear Your whispers of healing and hope. Give them sensitive hearts to listen, teachable minds to learn, and humble wills to obey. When doubts assail them, may they remember that no night is endless but always followed by a new day. Inspire them to put all their plans in Your hands, trusting fully in the power of Your love.

We pray in Your sovereign 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE.
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 26, 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 Senator 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 ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, today there will be a period for the transaction of morning business, with the time until 12:30 p.m. equally divided and controlled between myself, Senator STABENOW, and Senator COBURN or our designees. Today we will continue work on reaching an agreement to consider the unemployment and COBRA extension legislation. The majority leader also asked me to alert Senators that Senator LEVIN will come to the floor this morning around 10:30 to ask unanimous consent to confirm the nomination of BG Michael J. Walsh to be Major General for the Army.

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 for the transaction of morning business, with the time until 12:30 p.m. equally divided and controlled between the Senator from Michigan and the Senator from Oklahoma.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, this morning Senator COBURN and I have agreed that the majority will take the first 30 minutes, and there will be additional agreements from there. We certainly will be going back and forth between both sides this morning, since the time is equally divided. We will proceed this morning.

Senator HARKIN is here. I am going to yield time first to Senator HARKIN. Senator HARKIN is our leader, of course, on the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee. He has been a champion of the health insurance reform bill we passed, as well as the new assistance for families for college loans and Pell grants.

He has been a champion for working men and women on so many issues. It is not a surprise that he is here today fighting on behalf of working men and women who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own and are

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



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asking that we provide some temporary assistance to them.

I yield 10 minutes to the distinguished Senator from Iowa.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

CONTINUING EXTENSION ACT OF
2010

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague and dear friend, Senator STABENOW, for those kind words. I know no one who cares more deeply and works harder in this body for the average American family, for the workers of this country, than DEBBIE STABENOW. She is always there thinking about how we can make their lives better, what we can do to increase employment opportunities for working families. The fact she is here today leading the debate on extending unemployment insurance again shows her dedication to those hard-working men and women who make this country what it is. I thank the Senator from Michigan for her leadership in this crucial area.

I listened to the news this morning on the radio while driving in. The new figures are out for growth rate. We are growing now at about—last quarter was about 5 percent. That is a turnaround from a negative 6 percent 1 year ago. Also, in unemployment, about 1 year ago we were losing jobs at 750,000 each month. It came down to only 35,000 jobs we were losing a month in the last 3 months. Every expectation is that when we end March, we will actually be in the positive once again. It shows that President Obama's economic policies and programs and what we did in the Recovery Act are working.

This is encouraging news. However, there are still almost 15 million hard-working people who lost their jobs and still struggling to find work. For these people, the recession is still a reality and recovery seems far out of reach.

There have been 6.1 million people out of work for more than half a year. That is the highest number of long-term unemployed we have had since we started keeping track in 1948. The families of these long-term unemployed are hanging by a thread. Their savings are exhausted. The unemployment benefits they get are the lifeline that helps them pay the rent, put food on the table, and keep their kids in school.

Yet in the face of this unprecedented crisis and long-term unemployment, a short-term extension of unemployment insurance is being needlessly, needlessly—I would say cruelly—obstructed in the Senate. In a real case of *deja vu*, a few members of the minority party are yet again stonewalling a piece of legislation that I think most people in this room and most of the people in this country would agree is vitally important.

Indeed, we know for a fact there is broad support for extending benefits in the Senate because we already passed a

longer extension earlier this year. That is what is most illogical about this whole situation. We have already said we want to continue the Federal extended benefits program through the end of this year. We are now just waiting for the House to act. But now we cannot pass a 30-day extension to give the House the time they need to catch up. That does not make sense. We have already passed it for the year. We just need to fill in a small gap for 1 month. Those on the minority side are saying no.

As a result of this political gamesmanship, more than 37,000 unemployed Americans will be abruptly cut off from Federal unemployment benefits. They will lose their subsidized COBRA health insurance coverage during the first week of April. In my own State of Iowa, about 1,200 workers struggling with joblessness will see their safety net drop out from underneath them.

Blocking this bill may be a political game for some in the minority party, but it is not a game for millions of Americans who, in a matter of days, will lose their lifeline. For them, the obstruction of this bill, by just a few in this Chamber, is a personal and family crisis of the first magnitude.

It is interesting, we are going to be leaving here today. I guess this will be the last day before the Easter recess. We are out for 2 weeks. Senators will be going back to their States, probably traveling and doing different activities with their families. They will probably be having nice Easter dinners with all their families. Guess what. Not one Member of this Senate or the House will lose their pay or benefits during this period of time. How about all the people out there right now who are facing an April 5 cutoff of their unemployment benefits, a cutoff of their COBRA health benefits? These are not people who have a big bank vault with a lot of money on which they can draw. These are people hanging by a thread. They have been out of work at least for over half a year. It almost borders on the unconscionable that we would leave and not pass this bill.

I know those on the other side say we have to pay for it. I am all for paying for things, but I daresay, if a tornado wiped out a town in Oklahoma or we had a flood, as some are having in the Midwest, that wiped out a community and we needed to rush money in and rush items in to help people, would we stand here and say: Oh, no, we can't call that an emergency; that is not an emergency; somehow we have to come up with the pay-for right away. No, it would be an emergency. We would rush in to help.

For the thousands of Americans who are going to lose their unemployment on April 5, it is an emergency. It is as if a tornado hit their home or a flood wiped out their community. It is an emergency, and we respond to emergencies with emergency spending—that is all we are saying—for 30 days, short term. This is an emergency. Yet it is

being obstructed by the minority, by the Republicans. Let's say it for what it is. The Republicans are stopping this legislation. It is simply inexplicable.

There is no reason to put millions of families through the stress and uncertainty of wondering whether their benefits are disappearing. There is no reason to put States through the trouble and administrative expense that comes with a lapse in the program. That is even going to cost more money.

The flood insurance program also needs to be extended or many people purchasing a home will not be able to close on their homes, causing major economic problems for them and the home seller.

Extending benefits is good for the families, workers, the States, and our economy. Economists calculate that every \$1 invested in the unemployment insurance safety net generates \$1.90 in economic activity. Unemployed households spend these dollars on immediate needs—to pay the rent or medical bill, buy groceries and school supplies, or repair the family car—all economic activities that quickly inject dollars into our communities.

I call on my colleagues to stop their obstruction and do the right thing. Do the right thing. Just think about those people out there who are going to lose these benefits on April 5. I know some people say we will come back on the 12th and maybe by the 15th of the month we will be able to take care of it and we will go retroactive and fill that in. These are not people who can just go down to the bank and have a line of credit. These are people who probably in desperation—in desperation—will go down to some loan shark, get some kind of payday loan, something like that, and pay 20 percent interest on it for a couple weeks because they are that desperate.

I think it is unconscionable that we would hold this up because a few say we have to pay for it. We will pay for it. They say we cannot put this off on our children and our grandchildren. I agree, we have to be careful. We have to start getting out of the hole we are in. We are in a hole economically. Don't put it all on the backs of the few who have been out of work for so long facing getting their money cut off on April 5. Let's have a little heart. Let's have a little compassion. Let's have a little understanding of what these people are going through every day in their lives, the stress they have. Let's do the right thing and extend unemployment benefits for 1 month.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senator STABENOW control the time from 9:30 a.m. to 10 a.m.; that I control the time from 10 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.; that Senator STABENOW control the time from 10:30 a.m. to 11 a.m.; that I control the time from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m.; and that Senator STABENOW control the time from 12 p.m. to 12:30 p.m.