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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by the Reverend Joe Bates, Sr., from the Northwest Conference of the United Methodist Church of Alabama.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, Father of all humankind, we come before You with humble hearts to ask for Your blessings and guidance.

Pour out Your wisdom and discernment upon these elected representatives of Your people, and fill their hearts with peace and good will. Enable them, we pray, to practice just and merciful leadership that will bless and enhance the lives of all of our citizens.

We thank You, O God, for all the ways You have led us in the past. Bless us this day by helping us to walk in Your path of righteousness so that justice and peace may prevail in our Nation and in our world.

To You, dear God, we give our honor and our praise, even as we seek Your mercy, and we pray to You in Your holy 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. INOUE).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 10, 2011.

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.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
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 any leader remarks, there will be a period of morning business until 2:15 p.m. today, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes. At 10:30, Senator MORAN will be recognized to speak for up to 15 minutes to deliver his maiden speech to the Senate. At 2:15 p.m., the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of Max Oliver Cogburn, Jr., of North Carolina, to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of North Carolina.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a total of 45 minutes for debate on the nomination, with the provisions of the previous order remaining in effect, and that the vote on confirmation of the nomination occur at 3 p.m. today rather than at 2:30.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. As a result of the agreement just entered, there will be a vote

on confirmation of the Cogburn nomination at 3 p.m. today.

Further, the Senate Small Business Committee reported S. 493, the SBIR and STTR Reauthorization Act of 2011. They did that yesterday, and we hope to begin consideration of that bill early next week.

ACTING TO STRENGTHEN THE ECONOMY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is time once again for us to get down to business. Yesterday's budget votes didn't bring us any closer to a conclusion, but it did bring to our minds a lesson, and it does that very clearly. That lesson is that one party alone will not reach a resolution without the other's cooperation and consent.

We voted on the Republican budget proposal and on the Democratic budget proposal. Neither plan came close to the 60 votes needed to pass or even the 51 votes which would represent a majority of the Senate. But the exercise wasn't in vain. We have demonstrated publicly and on the record that we know the answer lies somewhere in the middle. Now it is time to find that answer in a budget that will reflect our values, keep the country running, and create jobs.

I can speak only for my caucus when I say we accept the lessons of yesterday's vote. We know we will have to make sacrifices to reach consensus, and we are willing to do that. Republicans have to be willing to move their position also. Perhaps they are willing to finally acknowledge that, given our deep debt, we can't afford government giveaways to millionaires and oil companies making record profits. Both acknowledgments would help close the deficit gap. Both would be big pieces to the puzzle.

Perhaps Republicans are willing to offer more reasonable cuts that the Democratic caucus can support. By reasonable cuts, I mean cuts that don't

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



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arbitrarily kick Head Start students out of class or rob college students of their Pell grants—both cuts resoundingly rejected yesterday—and I mean cuts that don't pull the plug on renewable energy jobs or cuts that fire thousands of workers at community health centers across the country. Republicans should be willing to look at our country's substantial budget and find cuts more worthy than those that would weaken law enforcement and border security to keep us safe. I hope they will.

I hope they will join Democrats in saving money by attacking waste, fraud, and abuse. I hope they will join us in making tough choices and avoiding the temptation to make counterproductive cuts. Let's come together to cut in a way that strengthens our economy and doesn't weaken our economy. Let's cut in a way that makes our neighborhoods, our schools, and our borders stronger, not weaker.

As the negotiation process begins anew, I remind my Republican friends that time is short. I also remind them that the deadline we face—a week from tomorrow—is the deadline they set. We didn't set it. Democrats warned from the start that the process would take a month. Republicans would agree only to a period half as long as that—2 weeks. Those 2 weeks are up, as I said, next Friday.

So my message is this to my Republican colleagues: You set the deadline, and the responsibility of meeting it is as much yours as it is ours. Both parties also share a responsibility to be reasonable. So let's get to work. We cannot negotiate this in the media. We cannot negotiate this if we are unwilling to give any ground. We cannot be stubborn and expect a solution. It is time to negotiate in good faith, it is time for all political posturing to end, and it is time for pragmatism, which is long overdue.

I would also say to my friends in the House that the Senate has produced two very strong jobs bills. One is the FAA reauthorization, which is long overdue. That was a bipartisan bill. It passed overwhelmingly here in the Senate and would save or create 280,000 jobs—a pretty good step in the right direction. Just in the last 24 hours, we passed the patent reform bill. That will create 300,000 jobs. These two jobs bills need to be completed by the House of Representatives so we can send them to the President. These two jobs bills are important. The House should focus on jobs, not these arbitrary cuts they have been making. So I hope the House would right away work on the jobs bills that have already passed the Senate—patents and, of course, the FAA bill.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

DOMESTIC ENERGY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, throughout the week I have pointed out that our Nation faces a day of reckoning on entitlements such as Social Security and Medicare, and I have expressed my disappointment about the White House's failure to lead on reforms that would save these programs at an opportune moment like our own.

The best time to solve the kind of fiscal crisis we face is when the two parties share power in Washington. Everyone knows we either address these problems together or they won't be addressed at all. Everyone knows the President has to take the lead. That is why Presidents from both parties have done just that during periods of divided government in the past. That is why many of us are calling on this President to do the same for the good of the country now.

But when it comes to job creation, the President isn't just failing to lead; in many cases, he is actually blocking the way. Nowhere is this more evident than in the area of energy exploration.

Americans looking at the price of gas at the pump these days are justifiably upset. What they may not realize is that some in the administration are actively working to prevent us from increasing our own oil production here at home. So this morning, with gas prices on the rise, I would like to step back for a minute and quickly review what the administration is doing to inhibit energy production right here at home. Taken together, it would be a pretty long list, including delays and suspensions and revocations and outright cancellations of lease permits, which translates into higher prices and fewer American jobs. So I will just list a few of the highlights.

The administration started by canceling oil and gas leases for domestic exploration. Immediately after taking office, the Secretary of the Interior, Ken Salazar, canceled 77 oil and gas leases in the State of Utah. One year later, the administration suspended 61 more leases, this time in Montana. Shortly after canceling the Utah leases, Secretary Salazar extended the public comment period to renew offshore drilling by another 6 months, dragging out an already lengthy process even further.

Then, immediately after the gulf oil spill began last April, the administration imposed a 6-month moratorium on offshore drilling in the gulf even as it canceled energy exploration that was set to take place thousands of miles away from the spill in the gulf up in the Arctic. Two Federal courts on three separate occasions have declared the moratorium in the gulf unjust. The administration has ignored them. It has kept the ban in place despite these rulings, forcing the drillers who have been affected by it to relocate their rigs—and the thousands of good-paying jobs they supported—to other parts of the world.

So if one is wondering where the jobs are, a good place to start is the admin-

istration's efforts to block American energy exploration. Senator MURKOWSKI points out that U.S. oil reserves at just three sources in Alaska—just three sources in Alaska—could replace crude oil imports from the Persian Gulf for nearly 65 years. Three sources in Alaska, currently shut down, could replace crude oil imports from the Persian Gulf for 65 years. Yet all three are off limits due to decisions made by or continued by this administration.

Behind all these actions is a complete disconnect. At a time when gas prices are climbing higher and higher, pinching pocketbooks and threatening an economic recovery, Democrats in Washington would rather ignore the fact that Americans will remain dependent on fossil fuel for decades to come. But we shouldn't be surprised by it. Two months before the President was elected, the man he ended up choosing as his Energy Secretary told a reporter how he would go about reducing America's dependence on oil. He said: "Somehow, we have to figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels in Europe." And if that was the strategy, Secretary Chu seems to be getting his wish. And the administration is doing just about everything it can to keep them there.

Now is the time to be asking what we can do to increase domestic energy production, not proposing ways to squeeze American families even more. That is why all of these actions by the administration, along with the tax hike on energy production some have proposed that will only be passed on to consumers in the form of even higher gas prices, are the very last thing Americans need right now. We should be looking for ways to lighten the burden on American families, not saddling them with a minivan tax.

There is a better approach. Rather than squeezing the public and killing jobs with artificially higher prices, we should be looking for ways to increase domestic production even as we promote alternative sources of energy for the future. An all-of-the-above approach to energy production—and the jobs that come with it—of the kind Republicans have been advocating for years would capitalize on the abundant resources we already have right here at home while at the same time looking for alternative sources of energy and new technologies that will free us from dependence on fossil fuels down the road.

This is a responsible approach. It protects existing jobs and creates new jobs at a time when Americans need them. It would reduce our dependence on foreign sources of oil. It honors the concerns Americans have right now about the rising price of gas, and it respects the reality that most of the cars in this country will run on gas for many years to come. But higher prices at the pump and fewer American jobs is the wrong answer.