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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, a Senator from the State of Delaware.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, we praise You because of Your righteousness, and lift our hearts in adoration to You, the King, Most High. Pour eternity into these brief lives of ours and use us for Your glory.

Lift our lawmakers to the heights of noble living, renewing them with Your hope and strengthening them with Your power. Lord show them how to make wise use of their days to become the people they ought to be and to do the things that make for peace in our Nation and world. May their highest motive be not to win over one another, but to win with one another by doing Your will.

Lord, we ask that You sustain the victims of the seismic devastation in Japan. We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS 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 14, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, a Senator from the State of Delaware, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mr. COONS 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, there will be a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

At 4:30 p.m. the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 10, the nomination of James Boasberg, of the District of Columbia, to be a U.S. district judge for the District of Columbia. There will be up to 1 hour of debate, equally divided, prior to a vote on that nomination.

Senators should expect two rollcall votes at 5:30. They will be in relation to the confirmation of James Boasberg and cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 493, the Small Business Reauthorization Act of 2011.

The current continuing resolution expires this Friday. We expect the House to send us a 3-week CR on Tuesday or Wednesday. We hope we can work out an agreement to consider the bill before the end of this week.

DOING THE COUNTRY'S BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, my thoughts and those of the entire Na-

tion, and certainly every Member of the Senate, are with the people of Japan. The earthquake that shook that nation has made the entire world tremble, and the tsunami that swept over its shores has engulfed us all with grief.

We are heartbroken at the images we have seen and the stories we have heard. We share the agony of the families who have lost loved ones and the anguish of those still searching for the missing.

The earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent catastrophes have created a humanitarian crisis of the first order, and the United States will do everything we can to ease Japan's pain and help it heal. As the devastation and rescue efforts continue, we know Japan and the world will meet this tragedy with tenacity and will respond to the immense loss with immeasurable hope.

This dreadful disaster is not stronger than the people of Japan's resolve to recover and rebuild, and it is no match for America's determination to help a friend in need.

Mr. President, it is difficult to think of the Senate's business at such a time as this, but we must. It is difficult to think of the Senate's business after hundreds of thousands of lives have been forever changed in an instant. Every matter seems immaterial in comparison, and our use of the adjective "emergency" when discussing budget concerns seems so misplaced.

But we must also focus on the business of our great country, and that is what the Senate will do this week. I hope both parties and both Houses will find the courage to come together before the weekend on a plan to fund the country.

I remind my Republican colleagues that this Friday's deadline is one they set; we didn't. We asked for 4 weeks to work, and they demanded 2 weeks. They asked for March 18. March 18 awaits us at the other end of this week, so it is time to get serious.

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



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Last week's budget votes proved what we have been saying throughout this negotiation: We must meet in the middle. The distance between Democrats and Republicans is not measured in money only. I regret to report that so far we remain far more divided on the willingness to compromise.

Democrats have made it crystal clear that we are determined to pass a budget. We recognize the reality that one party alone will not reach a resolution without the other party's cooperation and consent. We have accepted and acknowledged that we need to share the sacrifice. Democrats are willing to find reasonable ways to do that, and we have offered necessary cuts that will strengthen our future rather than weaken it. But we are still waiting for the Republicans to do the same. They are pretending that last week's votes didn't happen. They are covering their eyes and ears to the reality that their proposal—a shortsighted bill the tea party and the Republicans in the House of Representatives continue to support—was roundly rejected in the Senate.

We are still waiting for them to bring something—anything—new to the table. They have not done that yet. Listen to the Republican speeches and sound bites and you will hear no reasonable cuts, no serious offer, no willingness to compromise, and no sense of shared responsibility. You will hear no new ideas.

We can't afford another week of these games. We cannot negotiate through the media, and we cannot negotiate if one side is unwilling to give any ground.

We cannot keep funding the country a couple weeks at a time. How many times have we heard our Republican friends decry uncertainty, claiming it hurts job creation and worries the markets. How quickly they have forgotten their own advice.

Mr. President, it is time to lead. On this point, Democrats have been very clear. I hope the solution is at hand. But if no budget passes—if we cannot keep the country running—it will be clear which side will bear that burden.

This week, we will also start debating another jobs bill. We did the FAA bill, the patent bill, and we are told by the experts that is almost 600,000 jobs. The bill we are going to take up now will help small businesses do what American businesses do best: imagine, innovate, and invent.

Our bill that we will soon discuss will support a research and development program that has helped tens of thousands of small businesses create jobs and shape the future since President Reagan started the program three decades ago.

These investments work. They have helped get new ideas off the ground—everything from the electric toothbrush to a satellite antenna that helped our first responders in Haiti, to technologies that keep our food safe and our military's tanks from overheating in the desert.

One company in Carson City, NV, has used this small business innovation program's support to create technology that helps firefighters reach people on the highest floors of burning buildings. Another Nevada company from Henderson has developed an advanced rechargeable battery that our troops are using in the field. There are success stories such as this in every State because of this legislation that was enacted initially almost 30 years ago.

Small businesses are the laboratories of visionaries who create jobs and cultivate ideas. We, in turn, must help these businesses grow and succeed. That is what this bill will do.

Finally, let me say something briefly about gas prices. This budget debate has shown a stark contrast between our Nation's serious challenges and the lack of bipartisan agreement on serious solutions. The same is true when it comes to energy.

Drivers across the country are watching gas prices go up and up. They are worried about how expensive it is to drive to work in the morning or to pick up their kids from school or just to get to the grocery store and back. It is a serious challenge. But I am disappointed that the Republicans refuse to join us in offering a serious solution.

We know why gas prices are going up. First, the Middle East nations from which we import the vast majority of oil are in turmoil. That hurts production and exports. Second, OPEC and greedy investors control a widely speculative market. Third, big oil cannot quench its thirst for record profits, and it will pursue them at any cost to the consumer.

The Republican reflex is a replay of the same script we have seen time and time again. The Republican reflex is to demand more drilling, as if that will instantly ease the price at the pump. It is an easy argument to make. It will nicely line the pockets of their friends in big oil. It sounds simple, but as a solution to high gas prices, it is plain fiction.

Here is a little-known fact: The United States produced more oil in 2009 than in any year since 2003. So for all of the rightwing's finger-pointing at President Obama, it is worth noting that we have drilled more oil since President Obama has been in office.

In fact, when President Bush was in the White House, field production of crude oil dropped every single year. In his last year in office, prices and oil company profits rose to record highs. So let's retire the tired talking point that President Obama is sitting on the solution.

In fact, it is those same big oil companies that are quite literally sitting on that oil that Republicans demand. Big oil is sitting on more than 60 million acres of Federal land and water that they have leased and have a right to drill on. That means nearly 20 percent of our Nation's oil refining capacity sits idle. They have shown more interest in making profits than in making oil.

Let's pretend for a minute they did do the drilling. Even if big oil drilled on all of its offshore leases, it would have no impact on the price of gasoline during the whole next decade. By 2030, it might lower those prices by 3 cents a gallon. That is not my calculation; that comes from the Energy Information Agency.

Let's not forget the big picture: The U.S. consumes nearly 25 percent of the world's oil, but we have less than 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, and they are rapidly declining. We are addicted to oil and are at the mercy of big oil and OPEC for its price.

Instead of shortsighted straw men, let's use the alternatives we have at home, such as solar, wind, and geothermal energy, which are abundant in places such as Nevada. Let's encourage these investments, not cut them as the Republicans' budget plan proposes. Their budget plan would drastically affect the ability to do more with renewable energy.

These renewable energy sources are cleaner for the environment, wiser for our national security, and more stable for our economy. Best of all, they are made in the U.S.A. and will create jobs in our country.

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 be in a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the morning business time is not divided. It is under the control of whoever gets here; is that right?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I would like to speak for up to 15 minutes. I understand Senator KYL will be joining us shortly.

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

SBIR/STTR REAUTHORIZATION ACT

Ms. LANDRIEU. I come to the floor to urge my colleagues to consider voting yes on cloture this afternoon at