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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray

O God, You have given us the great hope that Your kingdom shall come on Earth. Use the Members of this body to work for that glorious day when Your will is done on Earth even as it is done in heaven. Open the minds of our Senators to the counsels of eternal wisdom, breathing into their souls Your peace which passes understanding. Give them the grace to seek first Your kingdom and help them to grow as You add to them all things needful. Lord, empower them through exemplary living to make this Nation a shining city upon a hill.

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

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 31, 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.

BUDGET NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we are continuing to work very hard to avoid the terrible consequences that would come with a government shutdown. As Vice President BIDEN announced last night after a 1½-hour meeting we had in his office just a few feet from where I speak, the Democrats and Republicans have agreed upon a number on which to base our budget cuts. That number is \$73 billion below the President's budget proposal. Now we have to get to that \$73 billion number.

As I said all along, this is not just about dollars and deficits; it is about principles and priorities. What we cut is much more important than how much we cut. The media is very concerned with which party will win this fight politically. I am much more concerned with making sure the American people do not lose out on this program we are doing. We have to make sure the cuts do not damage the basic fiber of our country.

Let me once again remind the Senate that children, students, teachers, nurses, and seniors would be significantly hurt by the cuts in the Republican-passed H.R. 1. The tea party is here today. They are here demonstrating that H.R. 1 should be followed—\$100 billion—damaging children, students, teachers, nurses, seniors, and many other people in this

country. H.R. 1 is not a piece of legislation of which anyone should be proud. Not a single child, not a single student, not a single teacher, not a single nurse, not a single police officer, not a single senior led us into this recession—not one. Punishing innocent bystanders will not lead us to a recovery.

We will continue talking and continue working to find a middle ground. Again, we have agreed on a number. We have not agreed on how to get to that number. I hope an agreement can be reached as to how we get to that number, but it will not come on the backs of middle-class families and the jobs they need, and it will not come if the other side continues to insist on unreasonable and unrealistic tea party cuts.

I appreciate Speaker BOEHNER and the rest of his Republican leadership in the House. What a tremendously difficult job they have. I am sure it is not easy trying to negotiate with the tea party screaming in their ears.

We have a lot more work to do. This country is at a crossroads in a lot of different ways. The economy is recovering—not as much and not as rapidly as we would like, but we cannot have what is going on here with the tea party demonstrating all these very harsh cuts, unrealistic riders, punishing innocent folks just for political ideology.

We have a lot more to do. I hope this latest development is the beginning of the end of this crisis because, remember, this is not the only crisis we as a country are dealing with. We have about a score of ships from our Navy trying to help the good people of Japan. We have a big situation going on in the Middle East, not only in Libya but all over the Middle East. We have a war going on in Afghanistan. As I speak, we have men and women whose lives are on the line in Afghanistan. We are trying to draw down in Iraq. We have a lot of issues we need to deal with.

We know there have to be budget cuts, and we are willing to do that. But

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



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let's also understand we cannot balance our budget with what the tea party is wanting us to do. We have a huge problem in this country with deficits. We have been a pretty good example of how we can balance the budget. We did it in the Clinton years. We spent far less money than we were taking in. We were reducing the debt. We were not having annual deficits. We know it can be done, but we have to do it in the right way, as we did.

We want to work with our Republican colleagues. We have proven we can do that with the two short-term CRs we have had. But I hope everyone understands that there is only so much the middle class of this country can take. There is only so much we can do to damage the basic fiber of our children, students, teachers, our nurses, and our seniors.

Head Start is a program that has been around for decades, and it helps a lot. It helps little boys and girls learn to read and do their math that they would not ordinarily have the opportunity to do. These are really poor children. H.R. 1 cuts hundreds of thousands of little boys and girls from that program. That does not help our country.

We know cuts must be made, but they must be smart cuts, and we want to do the best we can to work together to do whatever is reasonable to reduce this debt we have. We know it can be done. It has been done in recent history.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following any leader remarks, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business. During that period of time, Senators are permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. The first hour is equally divided and controlled, with the majority controlling the first 30 minutes and the Republicans controlling the next 30 minutes.

We hope to work out an agreement to vote on the 1099 and the EPA amendments to the small business jobs bill today. We have been trying to do that for several days. A number of Members of the Senate are attending the funeral for the late Geraldine Ferraro. Senators will be notified when votes are scheduled. They will be this afternoon at the earliest.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

TEA PARTY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, anyone who follows national politics

knows that when it comes to a lot of the issues Americans care about most, Democratic leaders in Washington are pretty far outside the mainstream. That is why we have one Democratic leader coaching his colleagues to describe any Republican idea as extreme, and that is why other Democrats are attempting to marginalize an entire group of people in this country whose concerns about the growth of the Nation's debt, the overreach of the Federal Government, and last year's health care bill are about as mainstream as it gets.

I am referring, of course, to the tea party—a loosely knit movement of everyday Americans from across the country who got so fed up in the direction they saw lawmakers from both parties taking our country a couple years ago that they decided to stand up and make their voices heard. Despite the Democratic leadership's talking points, these folks are not radicals. They are our next-door neighbors and our friends. By and large, they are housewives, professionals, students, parents, and grandparents. After last fall's election, a number of them are now Members of Congress.

Later on today, we will hear from many of them outside the Capitol. These are everyday men and women who love their country and who do not want to see it collapse as a result of irresponsible attitudes and policies that somehow persist around here despite the warning signs we see all around us about the consequences of fiscal recklessness. They are being vilified because, in an effort to preserve what is good about our country, they are politely asking lawmakers in Washington to change the way things are done around here. So this morning I thought we could step back and take a look at some of the things they are proposing and then let people decide for themselves who they think is extreme.

At a time when the national debt has reached crisis levels, members of the tea party are asking that we stop spending more than we take in. In other words, they are asking that Washington do what any household in America already does. They want us to balance our budget, and they do this because they know their history and that the road to decline is paved with debt. Is that extreme?

They want us to be able to explain how any law we pass is consistent with the Constitution. This means that as we write new laws, they want us to be guided by the document that every single Senator in this Chamber has sworn to uphold. Is that extreme?

They want us to cut down on the amount of money the government spends. This year, the Federal Government in Washington is projected to spend about \$1.6 trillion more than it has. That means we will have to borrow it from somewhere else, driving the national debt even higher than it already is. What is more, the Obama administration plans to continue

spending like this for years, so that within 5 years, the debt will exceed \$20 trillion. Given these facts, you tell me: Is it extreme to propose that we cut spending?

What else? Well, a lot of people in the tea party think the health care bill the Democrats passed last year should be repealed and replaced with real reforms that actually lower costs. Is that extreme?

Here is a bill that is expected to lead to about 80,000 fewer jobs, which will cause Federal health care spending to go up, compel millions to change the health care plans they have and like, and which is already driving individual and family insurance premiums up dramatically. Businesses are being hampered by its regulations and its mandates. A majority of States are working to overturn it. Two Federal judges have ruled one of its central provisions violates the U.S. Constitution.

None of this sounds extreme to me. In fact, if you ask me, the goals of the tea party sound pretty reasonable. These folks recognize the gravity of the problems we face as a nation and they are doing something about it for the sake of our future. They are engaged in the debate about spending and debt, which is a lot more than we can say about the President and many Democrats here in Congress. They are making their voices heard and they have succeeded in changing the conversation here in Washington from how to grow government to how to shrink it.

In my view, the tea party has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the most important issues of the day. It has helped focus the debate. It has provided a forum for Americans who felt left out of the process to have a voice and make a difference. It is already leading to good results.

It may take some time, but thanks to everyday Americans like these getting involved, speaking their minds, and advocating for commonsense reforms, I am increasingly confident we will get our fiscal house in order. Republicans are determined to do our part to advance the goals I have mentioned. That is why we have been fighting to cut spending in the near term, and that is why we will soon be proposing a balanced budget amendment. American families have to balance their budgets; so should their elected representatives in Washington. It is not too much to expect that lawmakers spend no more than they take in, unless you think it is extreme to balance the books.

That brings us to the heart of the matter. The last time the Senate voted on a balanced budget amendment, in 1997, the Federal deficit was a little over \$100 billion. Today, it is about \$1.6 trillion. Back then, the national debt was about \$5.5 trillion. Today, it is closer to \$14 trillion. Back then, the amendment failed by just one vote—just one. Today, Democrats are already lining up against it.