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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JEANNE SHAHEEN, a Senator from the State of New Hampshire.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, our Father, before whom the lives of all are exposed and the desires of all are known, continue to be at work in our lives.

Use our lawmakers as instruments of Your purposes, so that Your will may be done on Earth and Your kingdom may be established. Prompt our Senators to yield to the unfolding of Your mighty providence, as You remind them that our times are in Your hands. May they refuse to boast about tomorrow, depending upon Your strength and sufficiency for each day.

Great and marvelous are Your works, O God. Just and true are Your ways, O King of Kings.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JEANNE SHAHEEN 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, April 12, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable JEANNE SHAHEEN, a Senator from the State of New Hampshire, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. SHAHEEN 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. Madam President, following any leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m. today. The majority will control the first half of that, the Republicans the second half. At 11 a.m., the Senate will proceed to executive session to debate the confirmation of two prospective judges, Briccetti and Kronstadt. At noon, there will be a rollcall vote on confirmation of the Kronstadt nomination. The Senate will recess from 12:30 until 2:15 to allow time for the weekly caucus meetings.

Madam 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.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE DEFICIT AND THE DEBT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, as the Senate gets back to work this week, it is worth noting that a sea change appears to have taken place in Washington over the past few weeks. Just 2 months ago, the President proposed a vision of government that ignored the fiscal crisis virtually everyone else in the country knows we need to address. And Democrats in Congress proposed that rather than cutting Washington spending, we instead raise taxes on oil and gas companies, who, as we know, would pass it along to American consumers in the form of higher gas prices, at a time when gas prices are double what they were a mere 2 years ago.

In other words, it wasn't that long ago that both the White House and Democrat leaders in Congress were doing everything they could to ignore the Nation's \$14 trillion debt and to preserve the massive growth in government that they have presided over the past 2 years. But at some point in the past few weeks, Democrats in Washington finally got the message. The ground shifted and spending reductions Democrats recently described as "extreme" and "draconian," they are now calling "historic" and "commonsense." The debate has turned from how much to grow government to how much to reduce it.

This is a major departure from the standard Democrat position—and it suggests one of two things: either Democrats in Washington are finally waking up to the fact that our only hope of averting the kind of disaster we are seeing unfold in Europe is by forcing Washington to live within its means, or they have made a political calculation that Americans will no longer take them seriously if they continue to pretend otherwise. But either way, there now appears to be a bipartisan agreement in Washington that something serious must be done. Which brings us to an announcement by the

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Obama administration's top political advisor over the weekend that the President will change his position on entitlement reform, the deficit, and debt in a speech he will deliver tomorrow afternoon.

According to the administration officials, the President will now propose an outline of his goals in these areas. Apparently the President is finally ready to acknowledge problems that the rest of the country has been waiting for him to address. It is unfortunate that he had to be dragged into this discussion. But those on the left and right who have been clamoring for presidential leadership on these issues have to welcome the President's long-awaited decision to engage on them.

We all look forward to hearing what the President has to say, but it is my hope that in doing so, he offers more than the outline his political adviser suggested. As we know, House Republicans have put forward a detailed plan that seeks to preserve and protect Medicare for current beneficiaries and strengthen Medicaid, in part, by giving States more flexibility to implement it. At a time when thousands of baby boomers are retiring every day, putting even more pressure on our already overburdened finances, creative solutions like these are needed.

Hopefully the President will put forward a plan that does not just pay lip service to the commitments we have made to seniors and the poor, but which acknowledges the unique problems that this generation and a rising generation of Americans face. Too often, it seems, Democrats in Washington claim to be interested in helping those in need, when what they really seek is to protect big government. Meanwhile, Republicans are developing solutions that will enable us to keep our commitments to seniors even as we create new opportunities for the young and middle class with low-tax policies that lead to private sector job growth. Whereas Republicans see America growing its way to prosperity, Democrats seem to want to constrict opportunities for everyone, so everyone is forced to do with less—except, of course, the politically connected and those who are lucky enough to get a waiver.

But at least the President is joining in the conversation. Hopefully that conversation is an adult one, and does not devolve into the kind of unhelpful scripted, and frankly juvenile, name-calling that we saw in the closing hours of the debate over the continuing resolution last week. We all know that both sides will have to play a part in addressing the crises we face, so we would do well to leave all dishonest rhetoric aside. Both sides want to preserve what is best about America. If both sides acknowledge that up front, as we move from a conversation about billions to trillions, we will have much progress even though we have much work ahead of us.

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, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and Republicans controlling the final half.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 783

Mr. REID. Madam President, it is my understanding S. 783 is at the desk and due for its second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 783) to provide an extension of time for filing individual tax returns in the case of a Federal Government shutdown.

Mr. REID. I object to any further proceedings with respect to this bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard. The bill will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. REID. Madam President, it is my understanding that in this time for morning business, Senators are permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each; is that right?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Correct.

A MORAL BUDGET

Mr. REID. Madam President, I am always moved to hear the Pledge of Allegiance that marks the beginning of a new legislative day in the Senate. On the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War, the words "one nation, indivisible" mean more today than most other days. Along with Chaplain Black's inspired invocation, the pledge motivates us and reminds us of the true purpose of our work. Together, they recall our responsibility to our country, to our countrymen, and to our conscience.

I am particularly pleased to see the Senate open this morning. As we all know, last week at this time, even as recently as just a few evenings ago, whether the government would stay open was a very real question. As I said here late on Friday night, I am pleased we reached an agreement on a budget in time to keep the country operating.

I am pleased that the budget will make historic cuts, saving the country money so we can lower our deficit and do a better job of living within our meanings.

At the beginning of this debate and throughout the last few weeks, I reminded the Senate that in this negotiation, as in any negotiation, neither

side would get everything they wanted. From the start I also expressed my firm belief that what we cut would always be more important than how much. That is because our Nation's budget is a representation of our values and of what we value. It is one of the many ways we demonstrate as a Congress and a country what matters most to us, what is important. This concept is not unique to Democrats.

As the Speaker of the House and the chairman of the House Budget Committee have both said, our budget is a moral document.

Those following the budget debate have noticed something unmistakable. While both parties may agree in principle that a budget is more than simply a collection of numbers, our positions couldn't be more different. We stayed true to our values. We value the rights of Americans to afford a healthy life. That is why we passed historic health reform last year, but Republicans tried to use the budget to repeal those rights. We stayed true to our values, and we didn't let them.

We value women's health, but Republicans tried to use the budget to make it harder for women to get contraception that reduces abortions. Their budget also tried to make it harder for women to get cancer screenings, and they even tried to slash funding for cancer research. We stayed true to our values and we didn't let them.

We also value seniors' ability to support themselves, but Republicans tried to use the budget to slice the Social Security Administration. That would have meant delays for seniors and disabled Americans who count on the benefits they have earned over a lifetime of hard work. They also tried to use the budget to reopen the doughnut hole which would have sent seniors' prescription drugs skyrocketing. We stayed true to our values; we didn't let them.

We value our children's education, but Republicans tried to use the budget to kick little boys and girls out of pre-kindergarten programs and slash Pell grants that help so many students afford college. We stayed true to our values and we didn't let them.

We value our environment, but Republicans tried to use the budget to give polluters a free pass to poison the air we breathe. We stayed true to our values and we didn't let them. We value our economic security, but Republicans tried to repeal the promise we made to taxpayers that they will never again be asked to bail out a big bank when the bank loses its risky bets. They tried to use the budget to reverse rules we put in place to hold Wall Street accountable. We stayed true to our values and we didn't let them.

Finally, we value our responsibility to create jobs, but Republicans also tried to use the budget to reverse the momentum we have seen in recent months. The policies they tried to jam through the budget would have cost us