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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Monday, May 23, 2011, at 2 p.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2011

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Ever loving and eternal God, source of light that never dims and of love that never fails, draw near to our Senators as You teach and lead them nearer to You. Make them children of faith and heirs of peace. May they tackle each challenge with integrity and faithfulness, cheerfulness and kindness, optimism and civility. Lord, keep them ever mindful of life's brevity and of the importance of being faithful even in little things. Give them the wisdom to be patient with others, ever lenient to their faults, and ever prompt to praise their virtues. May they bear with one another's burdens and so fulfill Your law.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND 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, May 18, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND 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 morning business until 10:30 this morning. At 10:30, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 953. There will be 4 hours of debate. At approximately 2:30 p.m., there will be a rollcall vote on the motion to proceed to that legislation, with a 60-vote threshold. I filed cloture last night on the nomination of Goodwin Liu to be a U.S. circuit judge for the Ninth Circuit. The cloture vote on his nomination will be tomorrow.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

OFFSHORE PRODUCTION AND SAFETY ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, last night, Senate Democrats put forth a plan to raise taxes on American energy that, in their words, would have done nothing to lower the price of gas at the pump. As the chairman of the Finance Committee put it: "That's not the issue."

I think for most Americans, high gas prices actually are the issue.

According to a Gallup poll that came out this week, nearly 7 out of 10 Americans say the high cost of gas at the pump is causing financial hardship for their families. More than half of Americans say they have made major changes to compensate for it. More than 1 in 5 say high gas prices are jeopardizing their standard of living.

Americans are struggling. My constituents in Kentucky are hurting. They want relief, and all they are getting from Democrats in Washington is a dog and pony show. Their own Members admit their legislative proposals are gimmicks. They spent a week vilifying the energy industry and another week trying to punish them.

The legislation they proposed yesterday would have done three things: destroy jobs, send American jobs overseas, and make us more dependent on foreign sources of oil. That is what yesterday's bill would have done.

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



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Democrats themselves admit it would not lower gas prices by a penny. So it is a fair question: What in the world are they doing? Once again, Democrats have been faced with a crisis and have done their best to turn it into a political exercise rather than doing something to actually help people and create jobs.

They pushed a tax on energy because evidently some of their leaders think it polls well. So does Mother's Day. I would suggest Democrats spend a little more time looking at the price of gas at their local gas stations than at the latest polling numbers about class warfare rhetoric.

At a time when Americans are genuinely struggling out there, the Democrats have chosen to waste 2 weeks making a political statement rather than in trying to make a difference.

The American people deserve a lot better than that, and that is why Republicans have offered the Offshore Production and Safety Act of 2011, which we will vote on later today.

Our plan has basically three objectives; first, to restore American offshore production; second, to improve safety; third, to require bureaucrats in Washington to get to work on the permitting process to make a decision one way or the other.

It would have three corresponding effects. First, and most important, our plan would help reduce the price of gas at the pump. By unlocking our own domestic resources and speeding up the permitting process, our plan would actually do something to increase supply, putting downward pressure on price. As the Democratic Senator from Missouri said yesterday: "The more supply, the less the price."

It would also help alleviate our dependence on foreign sources of oil, and it would create thousands of energy jobs right here in America instead of sending them overseas, which is why this bill has the support of both the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

I have indicated what our bill does in general. Here are the specifics.

In order to restore American offshore production, our plan directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct previously scheduled offshore lease sales in the western and central Gulf of Mexico, Virginia, and Alaska. In addition, the plan will extend lease terms by 1 year for gulf leases which were suspended under the 2010 Obama moratorium.

After the devastating oilspill we had last year in the gulf, improving safety is one of our highest priorities. That is why our bill amends the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act to require all lessees to develop spill response and containment plans, establishes a public-private task force on oilspill response and mitigation, and orders a study on Federal response to oilspills by the Comptroller General to examine capabilities and legal authorities related to spill prevention and response to clarify appropriate Federal roles.

Finally, it is imperative we put in place a process that makes bureaucrats operate more efficiently on the crucial issuance of permits. That is why our plan puts time limits on the review of and decision on drilling permits, providing for 30 days of application review, with two opportunities for the Interior Department to extend the time period. Beyond that, it provides for a default approval if Interior does not reject the application within 60 days, and it directs the Interior Department to provide rationale for rejection of permits.

This bill is not our last on this crisis. We could do a lot more to increase production here at home, and we should. But it offers solutions, and every provision in this bill has bipartisan support.

At a time of near record gas prices, this is a modest approach, a good first step that takes everyone's concerns into account so we can actually achieve a practical result.

That is what Americans want. It is time to stop pointing fingers. It is time to stop picking winners and losers. It is time to stop telling Americans what is best for them.

It is time to stop holding Americans back with moratoriums, fees, bureaucratic roadblocks, and the ever-expanding reach of a President who seems to think business owners in this country need to get his permission first if they want to create jobs.

Every single American is feeling the pain at the pump, Democrats and Republicans alike. It is time for the two parties to come together and get serious about results. I urge all my colleagues to support the Offshore Production and Safety Act of 2011.

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 for debate only until 10:30 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.

Mr. McCONNELL. 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. COONS. 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.

OIL SUBSIDIES

Mr. COONS. Madam President, I rise this morning to commemorate Na-

tional Police Week and to speak to the service of the brave men and women in local law enforcement. But, first, I feel compelled to make a comment in response to the exchange between the majority leader and the Republican leader, to simply speak, if I could, briefly about the ongoing pain each and every working American family feels when they go to the gas station.

With the price of gasoline at an all-time high, with the price of gasoline flirting with \$4 a gallon, with the price of oil retreating from an alltime high, and with, most importantly, oil company profits gushing through the roof and hitting an alltime high, Members of our party, Members of this body came forward yesterday with a bill which got more than 50 votes but failed to hit the 60 needed in this body to make for cloture, which would have made significant progress on dealing with our deficit.

We just heard a comment on the floor that we need to stop picking winners and losers and need to move forward in helping America end its dependence on foreign energy. I could not agree more because the expenditures through our Tax Code—the billions and billions of dollars in needless expenditures through our Tax Code—that continue to subsidize some of the most wildly profitable corporations in American history is exactly that, picking winners, and the losers are the American people.

When I go home to my State—I know, Madam President, when you go home to your State—I hear people day in and day out say: Why can't you do more to help create decent jobs, to deal with the deficit and, more than anything, to stop the oil companies, which are despoiling our natural resources and picking our pockets at the pump.

This is not picking on one particular industry. This is rationally looking at our immense tax expenditures through the code and saying: There is a time here for us to stop. We would save literally \$21 billion by fiscal year 2021; that is, over the next decade, \$21 billion in deficit reduction. That does not solve the problem we need to come together and address as a body—both parties, both Chambers of this great Congress—but it is a significant downpayment.

I am from a State where we produce very little in the way of oil or coal or gas but where we consume a lot of energy and where we have lots of opportunities to invest in alternative energy—investments that would create new jobs, a competitive platform for the United States as we enter this new century and that could, frankly, help sustain our economy going forward.

The votes cast yesterday to sustain these senseless tax breaks and credits, to help keep afloat the most profitable companies in American history, strike me as doing exactly what we were just urged not to do—picking winners, where the average American is, in fact, the loser.