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

Eternal Savior, creator of the world, give us this day a sense of Your majesty. Fill our lawmakers with faith in Your power to help them solve the pressing problems of our time. Lord, enable them to meet their responsibilities with courage and optimism, looking always to You as a guardian and guide. When life's pressures overwhelm, give them patience and the joy of experiencing Your peace and love.

We pray in Your great 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, June 23, 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.

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.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 minority leader is recognized.

KENTUCKY STORMS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, people in my hometown of Louisville, KY, are still recovering this morning from a series of storms and possible tornadoes last night that inflicted considerable damage across the city, including at the historic Churchill Downs racetrack, home of the Kentucky Derby.

More than 600 Louisvillians were without power this morning after thousands lost power yesterday. The storms did their worst at Churchill Downs in South Louisville, where there were reports of funnel clouds, and some barns were destroyed, sending many horses running loose. In many parts of the city, there were downed power lines. The storms also did considerable damage near my alma mater, the University of Louisville, and in the Jeffersontown area.

The National Weather Service plans to be in Louisville today to survey the damage and determine if the city was indeed struck by tornadoes. The town is bracing itself for another round of severe weather with severe thunderstorms, high winds, and even hail in the forecast for today.

Luckily, it appears so far that only property was damaged and no lives were lost or people injured. The horses are all OK too, for that matter, which is extremely important to us in Kentucky.

We are thinking of those who have been affected by these storms and will continue to keep a close eye on the city of Louisville and make sure the people have everything they need to clean up and rebuild.

DEBT LIMIT

Mr. President, this morning I would like to address what I view as a worrisome development in connection with the ongoing debt limit talks, but first I think it is important to remind ourselves what the purpose of these talks is.

From the very beginning, the goal has been clear: to come up with a serious and significant plan for reducing the deficit as a condition for any agreement to raise the limit. Without such a plan, we are told, America could very quickly face an economic calamity of historic proportions, at a time when millions of Americans are still trying to recover from the last one.

As one of the major credit agencies recently put it:

The rating outlook [of the U.S.] will depend on the outcome of negotiations on deficit reduction . . . a credible agreement on substantial deficit reduction would support a continued stable outlook; lack of such an agreement would prompt Moody's to change its outlook to negative on the AAA rating.

This is serious stuff, and many of us have been hoping for and working toward a serious bipartisan solution, a plan that would convince the American people, the markets, and the world that America is capable of getting its fiscal house in order. Let's be clear about something else: We all know what such a plan would look like. Everyone, including the President, knows we cannot rein in our debt without a reform of long-term entitlements. It cannot be done. And everyone knows

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



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any serious plan would have to be in the trillions to get the job done. That is why even the Democratic chairman of the Budget Committee said this week that he wouldn't even support a plan that proposed to cut less than \$4 trillion over the next 10 years. That is also why it is so concerning to many of us that some have begun to suggest a different goal for these talks.

Over the past several days, some have suggested in various news stories that the real goal of these talks is to devise a plan that satisfies one side by reducing the debt and satisfies the other side by raising taxes. The suggestion here is that all this is all just some quid pro quo exercise between the two parties. This is a dangerous trend, and it is wrong. It is important that we dispel it.

The central issue in these talks, as every serious person knows, is our Nation's massive deficit and debt and the disastrous long-term consequences for jobs and the economy that would result if we do absolutely nothing about it. We have this problem for one very understandable reason: The government spends too much. The way to solve it is to spend less.

It is mystifying, really, that at the eleventh hour some would now propose tax hikes as a condition to any agreement. It is mystifying not only because of the absurdity of proposing a tax hike as a way to help the economy and create jobs, it is mystifying above all because we know quite well that a tax hike would never make it through Congress, not because of Republican opposition but because of Republican and Democratic opposition. We have already had the votes to prove it. Six months ago, Democrats couldn't even muster enough votes to pass a tax hike on upper income Americans when they had 59 seats in the Senate, a 40-seat majority in the House, and a Democrat in the White House. They couldn't get that done 6 months ago. Less than 2 weeks later, right after that effort to raise taxes, which they couldn't get done, they voted almost 4 to 1 in favor of keeping the current tax rates in place. That was when the Democrats had a huge majority in the Senate, a huge majority in the House, and a President of the United States. They couldn't raise taxes.

So there is one of two things going on here: Either someone on the other side has forgotten that there is strong bipartisan opposition in Congress to raising taxes or someone involved is acting in bad faith. We have known from the beginning that tax hikes would be a poison pill to any deficit reduction proposal. Those who are proposing them now either know this or they need to realize it very quickly.

That is to say nothing of those who are now proposing more spending as a solution to our debt crisis. This isn't just mystifying, it is absolutely farcical. Most Americans had to wonder if they were dreaming this morning when they saw this headline: "Democrats

Call for New Spending in U.S. Debt Deal." It is unbelievable. More spending as a solution to the debt crisis? What planet are they on?

All of which gets at the larger issue in this whole debate, and here I am referring to the continuing silence of the one person who matters most to its outcome.

For weeks, lawmakers have worked around the clock to hammer out a plan that would help us avert a crisis we all know is coming. Do you remember what Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said when asked what our biggest national security threat was? He said: Our debt. Erskine Bowles, Bill Clinton's Chief of Staff, Cochairman of the deficit reduction commission, called it the most predictable crisis in American history. We all know this crisis is coming, knowing at some point the President will have to sign on to some solution. So it is worth asking, where in the world has President Obama been for the last month? Where is he? What does he propose? What is he willing to do to reduce the debt and to avoid this crisis that is building on his watch? He is the one in charge. I think most Americans think it is about time he started acting like it.

It is not enough for the President to step in front of a microphone every once in a while and say a few words that somebody hands him to say about the jobs situation and our economy. Americans want to see that he is actually doing something about it. What they see instead is more bad economic news every day, a gathering crisis that threatens to make current problems even worse, and a President who is either unwilling or unable to recognize that our Nation's economy is in very serious trouble. He is the President. He needs to lead. He needs to show that he recognizes the problem. He needs to do something about it. We are not in the majority. We can't sign anything into law. That is the President's job. That is his job. Yet, until now, he has stood in the background. He has acted as if it is not his problem. Well, it is his problem. This is his problem to solve. America is waiting.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following any leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11:30 today, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the Presidential Appointment Efficiency and Streamlining Act, with 30 minutes of debate

on the Vitter amendment regarding czars and the DeMint amendment regarding Bureau of Justice Statistics. At approximately 12 p.m. there will be two rollcall votes in relation to the Vitter and DeMint amendments. We are looking at that now.

A number of Senators have a problem with two votes. We may only have one. We don't have that worked out yet, but we will notify all Senators when we do. We are going to very likely have a number of rollcall votes right after the noon hour today, starting around 2 o'clock. Other votes are expected.

THE DEBT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for the last month or 6 weeks the Vice President of the United States, JOE BIDEN, who served in this body for 36 years, has been assigned by the President of the United States to work with people who have been assigned by me, Senator MCCONNELL, the minority leader in the House, and the Speaker to meet with Senator BIDEN to work out problems that we have facing our country with this huge debt. Senator BIDEN has been working very hard. There have been numerous meetings with this group of people that we assigned. Progress is being made. Whether it is enough progress remains to be seen.

The President of the United States gets up early every morning, gets an intelligence report about what is going on around the world—there are a lot of things going on around the world that he has to keep his eye on, and that is an understatement. We have had many issues come about this last month on which he has had to focus. No one can suggest in any way the President is not engaged in what is going on in the country. He is briefed at least once a day by the Vice President as to these negotiations. Following that, almost every day he meets with his advisers as to what should be the next step.

I think it is unfair to say things such as, "Where is the President?" I think it is fair to take a little look at history. When George Bush became President, following that time of 8 years of President Clinton, he was given reports at his desk in the White House that showed there was about a \$7 trillion surplus over the next 10 years. We had developed, during the years of President Clinton, a number of procedures. One was the pay-go rules. We made sure if there was a new program that we couldn't pay for, we would take some money from another program, take the money we used for that and use it to take care of the new program. It was a time of economic vibrancy in this country that we have never seen before.

President Bush got rid of the pay-go rules and decided to do something unique. He decided to do everything on credit—two unfunded wars that are now approaching \$2 trillion in cost, none of which is paid for, money we borrowed from Saudi Arabia and China