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Senate

The Senate met at 1 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PATRICK J. LEAHY, a Senator from the State of Vermont.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, great is Your power, and Your understanding is infinite. We need You on Capitol Hill. As we gather this Saturday, a nation looks to our government's legislative branch for responsible action. Deliver our lawmakers from the paralysis of analysis when constructive and prompt action is desperately needed. Faced with potentially disastrous consequences, give the Members of this body the wisdom to work while it is day, for the night comes, when no one can work.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable PATRICK J. LEAHY 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, July 30, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable PATRICK J. LEAHY, a Senator from the State of Vermont, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mr. LEAHY thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, just as a side note, I am happy to see the second ranking Member of the Senate presiding. The people of Vermont are so fortunate to have the Senator and his wisdom.

Mr. MCCONNELL. If the Senator would yield, I expect he has not done that in 30 years.

Mr. REID. Well, I thought it would be nice to comment on the fact that is reserved for more junior Members. It is nice that my friend from Vermont would be here.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following any leader remarks, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to concur in the House message to accompany S. 626, the legislative vehicle for the debt limit increase. The time from 1:30 to 8 p.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

DEBT CEILING NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Republican leaders in the House of Representatives wasted this week pursuing a rightwing proposal they knew from the start could not pass the Senate. From the very beginning, Speaker BOEHNER's Band-Aid approach was fatally flawed. It would have put us back in this incredible position we are in today—debating whether the debt limit should be increased, something that was increased I don't know really how many times but about 19 or 20 times during the Presidency of Ronald Reagan.

I had a little whisper to my left that said 18 times, so 19 or 20 was not too bad. The Band-Aid approach the Speaker came up with was totally flawed. It would have put us back in this incredible position of fighting to increase the debt limit—something we did 18 times during Ronald Reagan's administration. We would be fighting the clock to prevent financial collapse. We would start that again in just a few weeks.

The Speaker's legislation was a concession to tea party extremists. Yet it barely passed the House yesterday with only Republican votes. It failed on a bipartisan basis last night in the Senate.

There was an excellent article in the New York Times yesterday. The headline was "The Centrist Cop-Out."

The facts of the crisis over the debt aren't complicated. Republicans have, in effect, taken America hostage, threatening to undermine the economy and disrupt the essential business of government unless they get policy concessions they would never have been able to enact through legislation.

That is the way it is. It could not be said more clearly. But knowing all along that this radical legislation, which was neither balanced nor bipartisan, would not and could not pass in our Chamber, Democrats have been working on a true compromise in the Senate. We have solicited ideas from our Republican friends and colleagues.

Let it never be said that Democrats in the Senate were afraid to compromise. We would welcome compromise. As recently as yesterday, I asked my friend the Senate minority leader to help make this Senate compromise more palatable. But we have heard very little from the Republicans.

I am satisfied that in the conversations I have had with a couple of Republicans this morning—I hope it bears fruit. I spoke to the chairman of the Budget Committee a short time ago. One of the proposals propounded by a Republican—my friend Senator CONRAD is working on it to see if he can work it out so it is language we can all live with. Senator CONRAD is an expert with

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



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budget matters. I thought it was important that he take a look at that.

I would have hoped, though, that someone would come to us, come to the bargaining table on behalf of the Republican caucus with ideas to improve a proposal already cut from the Republican cloth. Democrats are still willing to sit down and negotiate. My door is still open. I say again that I appreciate that several of my Republican colleagues have reached out to me in the last few hours hoping to reach a compromise. Senate Democrats welcome their input and look forward to working with them on a path forward.

My friend the Republican leader must generate some more action on behalf of his Republicans. The two parties must work together to forge an agreement that preserves this Nation's economy. We will need input from reasonable Republicans, including my friend the Republican leader, to get this done. But, unbelievably, another filibuster stands in our path. Republican filibusters have become routine. From the smallest measure to the greatest measure of national importance, they stall and delay and use every procedural trick in the book to keep this body from doing its job. But a filibuster at this late hour and when so much is at risk is irresponsible; it puts our economy at risk.

A majority vote was good enough for the Speaker's proposal in the House yesterday, but Republicans believe it is not good enough for the Senate today. And I have heard from my friends on the House side, to show how they are gaming the system over there, that they are going to have a vote on my proposal on suspensions. For those of us who served in the House, this is for naming courthouses and little measures that are of little importance. But this important matter, this matter dealing with the debt limit of this country, will take a two-thirds vote to pass. So they have gamed this system from the very beginning.

As I said earlier from the New York Times article:

The facts of the crisis over the debt ceiling aren't complicated. Republicans have, in effect, taken America hostage, threatening to undermine the economy and disrupt the essential business of government unless they get policy concessions they would never have been able to enact through legislation.

So they are going through, as I understand, on the House side, an effort to vote on our legislation, setting up a two-thirds standard to get this done, recognizing, of course, as I will outline here in a minute that a filibuster at this late hour here in the Senate and when so much is at risk is really irresponsible, and to say it puts our economy at risk is an understatement, and that is for sure. A majority vote was good enough for the Speaker's proposal in the House, but Republicans believe it is not good enough for the Senate today.

Rather than filibuster, I ask my Republican colleagues to work with

Democrats to make our proposal better. We have offered a reasonable, rational way for Republicans to help us avert default.

But let me tell you about the legislation at issue, how we believe how reasonable our legislation is.

This legislation was written by Democrats with both parties' principles in mind. It would avert default while cutting \$2.5 trillion from the deficit over a decade. It includes no revenues—a concession to House Republicans and Senate Republicans. It establishes a joint congressional committee to find additional savings this year and guarantees that the committee's recommendations will see an up-or-down vote on the Senate floor. It takes into consideration that—that committee must take into consideration proposals like the Gang of 6. Literally every single spending cut has been voted on or endorsed by Republicans in both Houses. That is the gist of the legislation: \$2.5 trillion and extending the debt ceiling until March of 2013—a pretty fair deal.

We have made some changes to this proposition. We hope it becomes more amenable to Republicans. We have improved the program integrity language to allow for more savings by combating government waste and fraud.

We have removed a measure that would have raised revenue by selling the spectrum—some \$15 billion—which will be done, and we should do it now, but it caused what is called a blue slip problem, which says if you have any revenue measures, according to our Constitution, they have to originate in the House. So it presents a so-called blue slip problem. I just eliminated it from this bill. It was \$15 billion out of \$2.5 trillion.

We also added a process conceived by my friend Senator McCONNELL to allow two additional votes over the next year and a half, two motions of disapproval before the President can raise the debt ceiling.

This proposal also protects Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits.

As you can see, this legislation was designed to appeal to our Republican colleagues as well as to our Democratic colleagues. We are willing to listen to ideas—I have said this several times—from Republican Senators to make this proposal better. But to say the time is short is an understatement. We can amend the underlying legislation that is here before us in the so-called message to the House. We still have time to do that. We could do it tonight and we could still meet the deadline on Tuesday. But we need to do it soon. That is why, at 1:10 in the afternoon this Saturday, I hope I have more Republicans contact me to see if they can work out something to work with us.

Already the economy has gone from bad to worse. Stocks continued a weeklong slide yesterday. I know my Republican colleagues love this country, every single one of them. I believe

they want to do what is best for our economy, every single one of them. But I have to say—and I say this for the third time:

The facts of the crisis over the debt ceiling aren't complicated at all. Republicans have, in effect, taken America hostage, threatening to undermine the economy and disrupt the essential business of government unless they get policy concessions they would never have been able to enact through legislation.

That is why together we must avert a default that would jeopardize veterans' benefits, senior citizens' benefits, Social Security payments, and checks for troops, even troops on the front line. It would also effectively raise taxes on every American family: Vermont, Illinois, Kentucky, Idaho, Nevada, all over this country. Oregon. All of the Senators on the floor. Even Wyoming, which does not pay much in the way of taxes. We could do that. It would effectively raise taxes on every American family. And businesses would also suffer by the increase in the cost of everything from groceries to their mortgages.

So I urge my Republican friends to join me and move forward with the only compromise plan that is left—in fact, the only option left at all—to save this country from default.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

DEBT CEILING NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, there is nobody in the Senate I respect and admire more than my counterpart, the Democratic leader. But we have been subjected, last night and again just a few moments ago, I would say to my colleagues from Wyoming and Idaho, to some Orwellian discussion about what is a filibuster. Most Americans, when asked the question "What is a filibuster?" would believe it was delaying something—delaying something.

So we have the astonishing development here that my good friend the majority leader is delaying a vote on something he wants to pass. We were prepared to have this vote last night. We are prepared to have this vote momentarily. We are prepared to have this vote at any point.

I want to disabuse my good friend of the notion that somehow it is going to pass. We just—he has not seen it yet, but we just delivered a letter to his office with 43 of my colleagues on it saying they are not going to vote for it. The House of Representatives is going to speak at 2:30 on this issue. They are not going to vote for it.

With regard to the 60-vote threshold, let me quote my good friend the majority leader:

March 5, 2007: "In the Senate, it has always been the case, you need 60 votes."