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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, a Senator from the State of Connecticut.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, the source of wisdom and might, with renewed powers and refreshed spirits, we return to this national Chamber of deliberation. We begin our work with the awareness that without You nothing of significance can be accomplished. Be the guardian and guide of our Senators as they travel the unbeaten path into our national future. Grant them wisdom and courage for the living of these days.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable RICHARD BLUMENTHAL 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, January 23, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, a Senator from the State of Connecticut, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

WELCOME

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I, first of all, welcome everyone back after the long break we had. I hope it was restful and productive for everyone.

As happens every 4 years, we have a Presidential election year and, as a result of that, things should be more tense than usual, but I certainly hope not.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 440 AND H.R. 3012

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 440) to provide for the establishment of the Special Envoy to Promote Religious Freedom of Religious Minorities in the Near East and South Central Asia.

A bill (H.R. 3012) to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to eliminate the per-country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrants, to increase the per-country numerical limitation for family-sponsored immigrants, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I object to further proceedings in regard to these two bills.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The bills will be placed on the calendar.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Senate will be in morning business until 4 o'clock today, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. Following that morning business, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of John Gerrard to be United States District Judge for the District of Nebraska. At 5:30 p.m., we will vote on confirmation of that nomination.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE—S. 968

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the cloture motion with respect to the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 70, S. 968, be vitiated.

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

WISHING SENATOR KIRK A SPEEDY RECOVERY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I was saddened to hear that Senator MARK KIRK suffered a stroke over the weekend. He had surgery this morning. I have followed it as closely as I have been able to. The doctors say he will recover, and I am confident that is true. He is young and in very good health. I wish him a full and speedy recovery and look forward to him returning to his work in the Senate as soon as possible.

FINDING COMMON GROUND

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Winston Churchill said:

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak. Courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

I know each of my colleagues in the Senate—regardless of political party—has the courage to stand up and speak in defense of his or her principles. This year I hope we each find the courage and faith to listen and cooperate as well.

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



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The Founders, in their wisdom, when drafting our Constitution, created a divided government. That is what they did with this bicameral legislature they envisioned. They also looked to see a robust debate on important issues. I do not believe they envisioned the obstructionism and gridlock that ground the Senate to a halt last year. Influenced by the tea party voices, Republicans forced us to waste months on routine legislation, they nearly shut down our government, and they held hostage the full faith and credit of the United States.

So I remind my Republican colleagues that not every discussion, every matter we deal with, should collapse into a fight. We do not have to fight about everything. Every piece of legislation we consider should not result in a political battle.

When we work together, we achieve greater results for the American people. That is why this year Democrats and Republicans must seek common ground. We must also admit it when we find that common ground, and work on that common ground we have discovered.

We should all be able to agree that Congress must do whatever it takes to help create jobs and strengthen our economy. Democrats believe it will take commonsense policies that protect the middle class and smart investments that rebuild our roads, bridges, and schools, our water and sewer systems.

We must combat income inequality now or the rich will keep getting richer and the poor getting poorer, while the middle class disappears. That is not fiction; it is fact.

I watched on public television within the past week or so a wonderful piece on "Bill Moyers Journal." I was so impressed with that, I called and spoke with him afterwards. I am not in the habit of calling people like that very often, but over the years we have spoken a couple times—three or four times probably over the many years I have been here.

The reason I was so impressed with what he said is that it reminded me I think of what a lot of people should be reminded. He talked about going to a public elementary school, he talked about going to a public high school, a State-supported university, and during all this time of going to libraries, public libraries.

We have to understand that government has been so helpful to most of us, and we cannot turn away from institutions of government which have been so important to us over the years.

So I repeat, we must combat income inequality and combat it now or the rich will keep getting richer, the poor getting poorer, and the middle class being squeezed all the more. I repeat, that is not fiction; it is a fact.

We Democrats will continue to defend working Americans, and we hope Republicans will join us in that regard. But if they allow the tea party to turn

every issue into an all-or-nothing battle, we cannot back down—we should not back down—and we will always side with the middle class.

We saw the results of Republican brinkmanship in December.

I was on a—well, I will not talk about TV shows—but as soon as we had the vote here, I walked up to the press gallery, as I was requested to do, and complimented publicly my Republican colleague Senator MCCONNELL—and I was happy it did get some press—because Senator MCCONNELL and I made an arrangement here to complete this legislation, and he stuck by that. I know he had tremendous pressure, and I cannot understand all the pressure he did have. But I admire and appreciate what he did in sticking with what the Senate did. So we then refused to give up on a tax cut for hard-working families, and it turned out well because Members of Congress came to the realization that the American people said they could not afford a thousand-dollar tax hike. Putting money back in the pockets of 160 million American workers should not have been so difficult. It should not have been a fight in the first place. I hope we all learned a lesson in this battle.

It is time for us to stop fighting. I repeat, we do not have to fight about everything. There comes a time—and that time is now—when we need to have the courage to stand up and fight for what is right.

This year it will be as important that we summon the courage to sit down and listen. Rather than standing up and fighting, we need to sit down and listen more often.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before my friend starts, the Republican leader and I deal with a lot of issues that come up in the Senate, and some of them are difficult. But the one thing we have that is kind of a diversion for us is we follow college athletics in our respective States. I have been very fortunate in Nevada that the University of Nevada has had a very good football team the last 5 or 6 or 7 years. I will not talk about the UNLV football item; it is not worth doing, as I told the university president.

But we also have in Nevada—and this is always the way it is in Kentucky; they always have good basketball teams—we have been doing very well in recent years, especially at UNLV; and now what UNR has is, I believe, the longest winning record in Division I basketball. They have only lost three games. UNLV has only lost 3 games.

So we have fun in our few minutes together talking about basketball. I have never seen a more avid fan of the University of Louisville. He, of course, follows the University of Kentucky, which is easy to follow, because their teams are always so good. But so is Louisville's team. And Louisville and UNLV have had, in recent years, some very tight basketball battles.

So I want the Acting President pro tempore and everyone else to know Senator MCCONNELL and I do, on occasion, divert from the business of the Senate.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I will add, we do enjoy our sports discussions. Of course, I always have the ultimate trump, which is the University of Kentucky has won seven NCAA championships and the University of Louisville two. So my friend is always trying to catch up. And I would say that—

Mr. REID. We only have eight more to go.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Only eight more to go. UNLV has a good team this year, probably not as good as Kentucky, maybe as good as Louisville, but it does give us an opportunity to catch up on each other's teams every day as we head to the floor.

WISHING SENATOR KIRK A SPEEDY RECOVERY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, let me start on a sort of sober note by saying we are all thinking of our colleague MARK KIRK. It is at moments such as these that we are all reminded of how fragile life is, and that there are far more important things in life than politics. So we send MARK and his family our prayers and our wishes for a speedy recovery.

THE JOBS CRISIS

Mr. MCCONNELL. I wish to begin my remarks today by simply stating the obvious: The jobs crisis we are in continues for millions of Americans. Many millions more are worried about the future. And Republicans are quite eager to work with the Democratic majority here in the Senate to jump-start our economy and set our Nation on an entirely different course than the one we have been on the last few years.

Let's be clear: The reason our economy has gotten worse and our future more uncertain has nothing to do with what Republicans in Congress will not do at some point in the future and everything to do with what this President has already done.

Americans are looking for an entirely new direction. It is one that focuses on growing the economy, not growing our Nation's debt.

So we are happy to work with the Democratic majority in the Senate to achieve these goals. But based on some of the news stories I have read over the last few weeks, it does not appear they are all that interested. Based on what I have read, it appears Democratic leaders right here in the Senate have gotten together with the White House