



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 158

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MARCH 26, 2012

No. 49

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.

Almighty God, look beyond the harmful paths on which we have walked and see our spirits created in Your likeness and longing to commune with You.

Speak to our lawmakers today and teach them to listen through earthquakes, wind, and fire for Your still small voice. Guide them to learn the language of prayer and daily experience its power in their lives. May they be calm when You would have them listen and obedient when You would have them act, always eager to receive directions from You.

We pray in Your holy 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, March 26, 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.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following any leader remarks the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4:30 p.m. today. Following that morning business the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 2204, the Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act. At 5:30 p.m. there will be up to two rollcall votes. The first vote will be a cloture vote on the motion to proceed to S. 2204. If cloture is not invoked, there will be a second cloture vote on the motion to proceed to the postal reform bill.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—H.R. 5, S. 2230, AND S. 2231

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there are three bills at the desk due for a second reading. I would like the clerk to report them if you so order.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5) to improve patient access to health care services and provide improved medical care by reducing the excessive burden the liability system places on the health care delivery system.

A bill (S. 2230) to reduce the deficit by imposing a minimum effective tax rate for high-income taxpayers.

A bill (S. 2231) to amend the Federal Credit Union Act, to advance the ability of credit unions to promote small business growth and economic development opportunities, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I object to any further proceedings with regard to these three pieces of legislation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

TRANSPORTATION JOBS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, tens of thousands of bridges—70,000, to be exact—and millions of miles of roads across the country are in a state of disrepair. But rather than putting Americans to work fixing these roads and bridges—and, of course, repairing the crumbling train tracks, highways, and sidewalks across this country—House Republicans are pandering to the tea party. They cannot do a bill. They cannot do a bill. They have tried. They cannot do a bill. They are now not fighting us, they are fighting among themselves. As if putting the tea party ahead of efforts to repair our Nation's crumbling infrastructure was not bad enough, House Republicans are risking almost 3 million jobs in the process.

I was very disappointed last week to hear that the House Republican leaders hope to pursue a 3-month extension of the highway bill. That is, at this stage, without any suggestion that they would go to conference with us. It would seem to me that is the most practical thing to do—have a short-term extension and during the process work to see what we can come up with, working together. I know this is foreign language to what has gone on in the House in the last year and a half, but that would be a good idea—to try that, to work together to come up with a bill, a 2-year bill, a 3-year bill. Working together, we could do that on a bipartisan basis, as we did here. Their short-term bandaid bill is no solution. Communities and contractors need certainty—especially going into the summer construction season. We want to make sure projects do not grind to a halt in 3 months because the House once again refuses to act.

• 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 American people certainly know at this stage whom to blame because of the problems over there. It is a crisis. It is a chaotic place we find over there. They are looking to cost us 3 million jobs. One week remains until these projects around the country lock their gates and lay off their workers. It is time for House Republican leaders to do what is responsible: take up the Senate-passed Transportation bill and pass it. The American people are watching and time is wasting.

FORGING A PATH FORWARD

Mr. REID. Mr. President, while House Republicans are squandering precious time and risking American jobs, the Senate will now move forward with a bill to repeal billions in subsidies to big oil companies.

Last year, Big Oil raked in \$137 billion in profits—more than ever before—but still received billions in taxpayer-funded giveaways. It does not make sense. Even with domestic oil production at its highest level in almost a decade, prices at the pump are rising. Oil companies are making money hand over fist.

When the price of a gallon of gas goes up by a single penny, quarterly profits for the five major oil companies go up \$200 million. I heard on the news this morning that the price of gas in the last couple weeks has gone up 12 cents. Well, that is more than \$2 billion for the oil companies.

This country continues to give taxpayer dollars to some of the most profitable corporations in the world—not some of the most profitable, the most profitable. They are doing better than Google and Microsoft and all of them. They are the No. 1 profitable corporations in the world. It is time to end this careless corporate welfare.

The only real way to bring down prices at the pump is to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil. That will take additional responsible domestic oil production and smart investments in clean energy technology.

The Senate will vote this evening to advance the Repeal Big Oil Tax Subsidies Act. This legislation ends more than \$2 billion a year in tax breaks for Big Oil, and it invests the savings in the clean energy industry, where it will grow our economy and create jobs.

Repealing wasteful subsidies will not cause oil prices to go up. Repealing wasteful subsidies, I repeat, will not cause oil and gas prices to rise. But reducing America's dependence on foreign oil will cause prices to fall for sure. But if Republicans continue to follow in lockstep to the drums of oil companies making record profits, one thing will be obvious: Republicans care less about bringing down gas prices than about helping oil companies that do not need help. Congress should pass this legislation and do it quickly before another taxpayer dollar is spent on wasteful handouts to Big Oil.

How do the American people feel about this? Of course, by an overwhelming margin, they agree with us.

The Senate must also quickly move to reform our postal system, and in the coming weeks, we also must reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act, pass additional job-creation measures, and take up the crucial cybersecurity bill.

The Pentagon says passing cybersecurity legislation is the single most important action Congress can take to improve national security. That is why I will bring a bill to the floor very soon. Bipartisan efforts to craft comprehensive cybersecurity legislation have been ongoing for years. It is now time to act. It is time for Republican colleagues who have been involved in this effort from the start to sit down and help us move this matter forward. We are going to move this bill onto the floor. We have had hard work done by Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator COLLINS. It is a bipartisan bill. I would hope both parties would agree this legislation is a priority. I hope so.

As always, Mr. President, I hope Democrats and Republicans will be able to work together to forge a path forward on these most important issues.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. REID. Mr. President, would the Chair announce the business of the day.

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 4:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. REID. 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. JOHANNIS. Mr. 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.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to enter into a colloquy with my Republican colleagues for up to 30 minutes.

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

HEALTH CARE

Mr. JOHANNIS. Mr. President, I rise today to once again speak about a

topic I have spoken to many times over the last 2 years; that is, the health care law.

Today I would like to focus on a number of aspects of the health care law, but to start I would point out that this law actually enacted the largest expansion of Medicaid since its inception in 1965. The law dramatically increases government spending, it ties the hands of States, it is going to bankrupt State budgets, and it traps nearly 26 million more Americans in a broken system.

Last week's Medicaid Actuary report indicates that 25.9 million more Americans will be dumped on Medicaid under the new law. The week before, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office pointed out that Federal spending on Medicaid will increase by \$168 billion. That is just compared to last year's projection. That means this expansion alone is projected to cost the Federal taxpayers \$795 billion through 2021.

That is at a time when not only our Federal budget is struggling, but in addition to that our State budgets are in trouble. Added up, the Federal Government will spend \$4.6 trillion on Medicaid over the next 10 years, a staggering number—\$4.6 trillion.

Medicaid spending is projected to increase 35 percent once the law is fully implemented. So with our national debt now approaching \$16 trillion and compounding exponentially, as we borrow 42 cents of every \$1 we spend every day, instead of reining in costs, the health care law is doubling down with spending.

But the Medicaid expansion did not stop with wrecking Federal budgets. It hammers State budgets as well. This program already consumes 24 percent of State budgets. The law's Medicaid expansion will force \$118 billion in additional unfunded mandates on our States through 2023. The National Governors Association has weighed in on this issue. They said: "Spending on Medicaid is expected to consume an increasing share of State budgets and grow much more rapidly than State revenue growth, resulting in slow or no growth in education, transportation, or public safety."

The Nebraska impact tells the story. The Governor commissioned a study in Nebraska to see what the impact would be on the health care law on the State budget. Nebraska will spend an additional \$526 million to \$766 million over the next 10 years on its Medicaid Program. The expansion could add up to 145,000 Nebraskans to the Medicaid Program over the next decade.

Currently, one in nine Nebraskans is enrolled in Medicaid. The new provisions of the law will expand eligibility to one in five Nebraskans, 20 percent. Governor Heineman addressed this issue. He said: This unfunded and unparalleled expansion of Medicaid is an unfair and unsustainable mandate on Nebraska and other States. The Federal health care law is an extraordinarily large and excessive unfunded