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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 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.

Gracious God, our shelter from life's storms, give to the Members of this body a faith strong enough to face the tempest of our time. Strengthen them to confront with courage the challenges that come, knowing that Your purposes will prevail and that Your providence will sustain them.

Lord, help that this day with singleness of purpose and constancy of commitment, Your Senators will seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, serving You with unfettered feet and following You with freedom and faith. Reign as sovereign Lord in this Chamber. Guide the deliberations, debates, and decisions of this day.

We pray in Your holy 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, April 18, 2012.

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 leader remarks the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1925, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act. The majority will control the first 30 minutes, the Republicans the final 30 minutes. The filing deadline for first-degree amendments to the substitute amendment and the postal reform bill is 1 o'clock this afternoon.

POSTAL REFORM

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I really hope we can work out an agreement on the postal reform bill. I spoke to Senator LIEBERMAN, the chairman of the committee, late last night, and he is hopeful, as I am, that we can move forward on this legislation. It is a shame if we cannot. As we speak, there are more than half a million men and women working for the Postal Service, and 25 percent of them are returning veterans. We have 30,000 post offices around the country. We have about 8 million people who depend on the post office for their jobs. So to think that we can't move forward on this would be really untoward. It is something we really need to get done. I am hopeful we can get that done. People can offer amendments, and we should do that as

quickly as possible and move forward on this legislation. If there is no agreement, we will have to vote on the substitute amendment tomorrow morning. I repeat, it would be too bad if we cannot get it done.

Enshrined in the Constitution by the Founding Fathers, the U.S. Postal Service has delivered this Nation's letters and other mail since the day of the quill pen and the inkwell. That is why we have inkwells here. That is what these are. I have paper clips in mine now, but originally that was the only way people who sat at these desks and did their work could write. Most of the time it was for mail.

Mail has been delivered through the years when stamps cost a nickel. Mail has been delivered through the years when mail traveled up and down America's waterways by steamship, and it has been delivered through two world wars when soldiers sent letters home to their sweethearts and families. Through it all, the U.S. Postal Service has been there to deliver the mail, rain or shine. But today America's postal system is in crisis.

We kind of use that as a throwaway, "through rain or shine." When I was a little boy, we had really bad snowstorms all over the West. In Searchlight, NV, we had a little snow a few times a year. But we had 3 feet of snow on the level. It was very, very bad.

I can remember a man named Con Hudgens. The mail came to Searchlight. There was a railroad that went through Nipton, CA, which was 22 miles from Searchlight. As that train sped through Nipton, they had an apparatus that would snatch the mail that was on the train. That mail was for Searchlight. They sorted it that way. This old man, Con Hudgens, walked through snow 22 miles to bring the mail. That is what we talk about when we say that mail has been delivered through rain or shine. That is the mantra of the post office.

But today America's postal system is in crisis. Today a personal note from a

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



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friend or payment to the electric company can be delivered online with a few quick keystrokes on your computer. This changing technology has meant serious new challenges for an organization that has serviced citizens of this Nation from its very beginning. It has served this Nation whether they live on city streets or rural routes.

Although the world the post office deals with has changed, the postal system's message and mission have not changed; that is, to deliver letters, packages, medicines—much of which is vital—online purchases, birthday cards, phone bills to hundreds of millions of Americans no matter how rural or how urban the places they call home. Neither has the current crisis changed the importance of that mission. Nearly half of rural households don't have broadband Internet access, making it difficult or impossible to pay bills or ship packages online. Rural families in Tuscarora, NV, or Baker, NV, in Elko County, NV, rely on the Postal Service. That is their way of communicating.

Small businesses benefit from cost-saving options offered at the post office, such as bulk mail. American businesses rely on the U.S. Postal Service. As I indicated earlier, 8 million people's jobs are dependent on the Postal Service.

For seniors who cannot leave their homes, mail carriers deliver lifesaving medications—an important link to the outside world. Elderly Americans rely on the U.S. Postal Service.

I will go home tonight to my home here in Washington, and there will be some mail there. A lot of it is what some people refer to as junk mail, but for the people who are sending that mail, it is very important.

And talking about seniors, seniors love to get junk mail. It is sometimes their only way of communicating or feeling they are part of the real world. Elderly Americans, more than any other group of people in America, rely on the U.S. Postal Service.

Unless we act quickly, thousands of post offices—I indicated there are more than 30,000 in America—many of them rural, will close. I said this earlier today, and I will repeat it. These rural post offices are the only way people in those small communities have to communicate with the outside world. There may be some medicine they are getting, it may be to keep in touch with their family or friends, but it is their way of keeping in touch with the world. Hundreds of mail-processing facilities will close, and the jobs of hundreds of thousands of dedicated postal employees are at risk.

Timely, dependable mail delivery is not the only thing at stake in this debate. Today the Postal Service employs, as I have indicated, more than half a million middle-class workers, and the postal system gives more than 130,000 men and women who volunteered for this country in the armed services a chance to serve again. A

quarter of all postal employees are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces. So there is really a lot at stake in this debate.

The Postal Service has been playing an important role in the history of this country and the lives of its citizens for more than 200 years, but it has also seen a 21-percent drop in mail volume over the last 5 years and is on the verge of insolvency. Yesterday the Postal Service lost about \$20 million—1 day.

Changing times demand a leaner, more modern post office. To make that possible, we must pass legislation. The Senate must act. We must change the Postal Service business model. They cannot do it on their own. They need legislation. They need it to keep pace with technology and to keep up with the times.

The bipartisan bill before this body enacts reforms that are major but measured. The people who have worked on this so hard—I have already talked about Senator LIEBERMAN. His counterpart, Republican Senator COLLINS, has worked extremely hard. I have worked with her to maintain the 6-day delivery. This is something she believes in strongly. I really admire her for the fight she has put up to get the things that she feels are important in this legislation.

If we act, it would reduce the number of employees and facilities the Postal Service maintains in a responsible way, and that would protect employees and millions of Americans relying on the mail. It would responsibly restructure the postal system, while preserving overnight 6-day-a-week delivery. It would help the Postal Service innovate and grow by offering new products that will attract new customers and, most importantly, would save the Postal Service from insolvency. It will help an institution enshrined in the Constitution modernize to meet the challenges of a changing world.

What Senators LIEBERMAN and COLLINS have come up with is not perfect, and we all recognize that. It is not a perfect compromise. It will not make every Senator happy. It will not make every American happy. It will not save every post office. But it is a very good compromise and one that is bipartisan. It will save an institution that has been a part of the fabric of this Nation for more than 200 years. So let's work together to save the American Postal Service, which, by the way, is the best in the world.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

GAS PRICES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, with gas prices hovering around \$4 a gallon, I think it is important for the American people to realize there are really two camps on this issue here in Washington: there are those who want to do something about the problem, and there are those who want people to think they are doing something about the problem. And let's be clear—President Obama is firmly planted in the "say anything but do nothing" camp. If there were any doubt about that, he dispelled it when he blocked the Keystone Pipeline and then again this week by embracing the age-old Democratic dodge of blaming gas prices on speculators.

Look, what bothers Americans is not that the President has unpopular views on this issue. Everyone knows he does not really support an all-of-the-above approach to energy. What bothers people is the fact that he pretends as though he does.

What bothers people is the President is blocking one-half of a pipeline one day and showing up at a ribbon cutting for the other half on another day. It is blocking domestic energy and then taking credit for increases that came about as a result of his predecessor's decision. It is pretending that speculators have a big impact on the price of gas when his own staff can't even point to any.

The President said he was different, and a lot of people believed him. But to a growing number of Americans that is just what he has become: just one more politician saying the same things they always say.

This week has been a real clarifier for people when it comes to this President. Whether it is the Buffett tax that would not lower the deficit or a commission on speculators that even the White House says would not lower the price of gas, what people have seen this week is a President who seems a lot more interested in looking like he is solving problems than actually solving them.

For years Washington Democrats have had the same totally rigid opposition to expanding domestic energy exploration. The only people they seem to listen to are extremists. But instead of just stating their position and letting the political chips fall where they may, they pull out the same poll-tested talking points they always do, on the assumption that reporters will just reprint them like it is the first time they have used them and that everybody else will just somehow forget.

But with gas prices at about \$4 a gallon, it is time somebody called them out on it. Ten years ago today Democrats voted down a bill to open a tiny