



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 158

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MAY 7, 2012

No. 63

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 spirit, the center of our hope, we know our needs. Life has taught us that we can't walk alone. So be with our lawmakers to help, to comfort, and to sustain them. Lord, guide them through the changes and chances of their labors. Whatever light may shine or shadows may fall, empower them to meet life with a steady gaze, to walk in strength, wisdom, purity, and joy. Create in them a passion to do what is right, and give them the ability to do it. As they seek to live with honor, may their thoughts, words, and actions bring glory to You.

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, May 7, 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 BLUMEN-

THAL, 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, we are now considering the motion to proceed to the Stop Student Loan Interest Rate Hike Act.

At 4:30 p.m. today, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider three judicial nominations: the Nguyen nomination, a ninth circuit nominee, and the Baker and Lee nominations, which are two U.S. district court nominations from Arkansas and Illinois, respectively. At 5:30 p.m., there will be up to three rollcall votes on confirmation of the nominations.

STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, a woman from Nevada by the name of Amy—a single mother from Las Vegas—was devastated when she was laid off 3 years ago because of her employer having little work. She wasn't in love with her job doing bookkeeping for a local construction company, but she loved the steady paycheck. Looking back on that pink slip, Amy views it, of course, as a setback in one sense, but she feels very good about the fact it gave her a second chance.

Like many resourceful Americans who lost their jobs after the financial and housing markets collapsed, Amy took the opportunity to return to school. She enrolled in classes at the

College of Southern Nevada and completed her associate's degree at the age of 33. Going back to school transformed her life. She got involved in the political process for the first time. During her whole time at school she maintained straight A's—a 4.0 grade point average—and was elected student body president. But she also racked up \$20,000 in student loan debt.

Amy doesn't regret the decision to go to the university. Not only has she gotten a second chance at college, she has shown her 14-year-old son the power of education. Still, working three part-time jobs and living on a few thousand dollars a year hasn't been easy. That is an understatement. It would have been impossible for her to get her education if she hadn't gotten her Federal student loans. But Amy will need more loans to complete her bachelor's degree at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, where she starts classes this fall.

For most students, taking on debt is the only way to turn dreams of higher education into a reality. The average student graduates with \$25,000 in loan debt. On July 1, the interest rates on Federal loans are set to double for more than 7 million students. Unless Congress acts quickly, rates will jump from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent. That will cost Amy and millions of other students at least \$1,000. For a single mom working three part-time jobs, \$1,000 is the difference between completing her bachelor's degree and simply dropping out of school. In Nevada, higher interest rates will affect 26,000 students. College is already unaffordable for far too many Americans, and we cannot afford to put higher education any further out of reach. So Senate Democrats have introduced a proposal to freeze student loan interest rates at current levels for a year, without adding a single penny to the deficit. Democrats will vote to advance that proposal tomorrow, before noon, and, hopefully, the Republicans will join us.

• 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 Republicans claim they share Democrats' goal of protecting these 7 million students I have talked about from these interest rate increases. We will see. But they insist we should pay for this proposal with unreasonable cuts to preventive health care services for millions of Americans. This is a program that is so vitally important to the health care delivery system in this country. Senators MIKULSKI, HARKIN, and others have worked very hard to maintain this program. It is so essential. Republicans know their proposal would never pass the Senate—never—and President Obama has said he would veto more cuts to crucial preventive health care. But there is already a compromise on the table. Our legislation closes a loophole that allows the rich to avoid paying taxes they already owe. Our proposal is not a new tax. It would simply stop wealthy Americans from dodging the taxes they are required to pay. If Senate Republicans are truly serious about protecting 7 million students, they will work with us to pass this reasonable proposal.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATIONS OF AJIT VARADARAJ PAI AND JESSICA ROSENWORCEL TO BE MEMBERS OF THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 512 and 513; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that any related statements be printed in the RECORD; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The nominations considered and confirmed are as follows:

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

Ajit Varadaraj Pai, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission for a term of five years from July 1, 2011.

Jessica Rosenworcel, of Connecticut, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission for a term of five years from July 1, 2010.

Mr. KYL. Mr. President, I rise today to say a few words about the nomination of Ajit Pai to be a member of the Federal Communications Commission. I have supported his nomination and that of his fellow nominee, Jessica Rosenworcel, and am pleased that unrelated matters have finally been resolved and that the Senate has confirmed both nominees.

Ajit is somebody whom many of us have come to know from his years of

public service, whether on the Senate Judiciary Committee, at the Department of Justice, where Ajit worked on both antitrust and legal policy matters, or in the general counsel's office of the FCC. I especially appreciate his important work on the Roberts, Miers, and Alito Supreme Court nominations during the 109th Congress, as well as his careful attention to national security matters while at the Department of Justice.

Ajit is the son of immigrants who came to this country seeking opportunity, as did the ancestors of so many of our fellow Americans. They settled in the small town of Parsons, KS, population of 10,000. During his testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee, Ajit shared his memories of the sense of community and the Midwestern values that he learned in Parsons. He worked hard in school, excelled at both Harvard College and the University of Chicago Law School, and built a career in law and policy. Today, Ajit finds himself being confirmed to this position of honor and receiving a unique opportunity to serve his Nation. I am certain that his parents, having come to this country just 40 years ago, are immensely proud of him.

We should all be grateful that individuals like Ajit choose to serve in these important positions, especially in fields where there are also opportunities in private life. He will be a member of the FCC for more than 4 years. I am grateful for his service and appreciate that he and his wife Janine have agreed to make this sacrifice for the good of our Nation.

I am very disappointed that these nominations have been delayed for so long for nongermane reasons. Good men and women simply will not volunteer to serve if they are arbitrarily forced to spend months in limbo, uncertain as to their future.

As an FCC Commissioner, Ajit will be one of five individuals overseeing an agency with 2,000 employees and a budget of \$350 million. The Commission has broad regulatory authority over the Nation's communications industry. The communications landscape has evolved dramatically, not just during my lifetime but since I entered the Senate in 1995 and even in the past few years. It is sometimes difficult to remember how we functioned before we had the ability to reach most people on cell phones, to access the Internet from computers in any corner of the globe, or to watch videos of our children and grandchildren on mobile devices. Most Americans were raised in a world in which the television offered just a few channels, there was no cable news, and telephones had rotary dials.

Policymakers should be reminded that many of the technologies that we take for granted today will soon be gone, and we do not really know which technologies will become obsolete and in which direction the Nation's innovators and consumers will take us. Congress and the FCC do not make

those decisions, or at least they should not. These decisions should be made by the American people in their capacity as consumers, businessmen, entrepreneurs, investors, and citizens.

Government does not create innovation or make entrepreneurs, and it should not be in the business of picking winners or losers or trying to shape private investment. The government's proper role in communications, as in other sectors of our economy, is to establish clear and stable rules that encourage competition, that give consumers choice and allow markets to thrive, and that keep bureaucratic preferences and politics to a minimum.

Ajit has made clear that he shares this understanding of his role. I think that we can expect good things from him as a member of the Federal Communications Commission.

I congratulate Ajit on this honor and am proud to have supported his nomination.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate resumes legislative session.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Mr. REID. Would the Chair announce the business of the day?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

STOP THE STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATE HIKE ACT OF 2012—MOTION TO PROCEED

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 2343, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to S. 2343, a bill to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to extend the reduced interest rate for Federal Direct Stafford Loans, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, parliamentary inquiry: We are now on the Stop The Student Loan Interest Rate Hike Act of 2012, is that not correct?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senate is on the motion to proceed to that measure.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

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

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I can't emphasize strongly enough the importance and the urgency of the legislation before us—the Stop the Student Loan Interest Rate Hike Act of 2012—which the majority leader spoke about. On July 1, unless Congress intervenes, the interest rate on Federal student