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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, a Senator from the State of Delaware.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who has made of one blood all the nations of the Earth, hallowed be Your Name. Give Your grace to our lawmakers so that their lives will give a witness to Your providential power and love. May the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts be acceptable to You. Give them courage in danger, steadfastness in trial, and perseverance in difficulty.

Lord, we also ask You to touch Senator MARK KIRK with Your healing hands, restoring him to robust health.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS 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 24, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, a Senator from the State of Delaware, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mr. COONS 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 leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4 p.m. today. During that period of time, each Senator will be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes. The majority will control the first 30 minutes and the Republicans will control the second 30 minutes. The Senate is going to recess from 12:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. today to allow for our weekly caucus meetings. The State of the Union is at 9 p.m. tonight. Senators will gather at 8:30 p.m. to proceed to the House of Representatives.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for generations this was the American promise: If you worked hard and played by the rules, success would be within your reach. We call that success the American dream—to earn a decent wage, buy a home, put your children through school, and retire comfortably. For many people in this country, that dream has drifted further and further from reality. The recession cost many Americans their jobs, homes, savings, and basic economic security. Many are still struggling. Although the economy has made slow progress toward recovery, there is still much more work to be done before every American who wants to work can find a job.

But the terrible recession is only part of the problem. The same Wall Street greed that caused the financial collapse is fueling the greatest income

disparity since the Great Depression. In the last few decades, the average CEO's income has multiplied 250 times. Meanwhile, CEO's employees have watched their incomes creep up barely at all.

So America is at a crossroads. As President Lyndon Johnson said in 1965—and it is time to ask that now—and I quote:

... not only how to create wealth but how to use it; not only how fast we are going, but where we are headed.

That is what he said. And the path we choose will determine what kind of a country we will be. We can choose to be the kind of nation where the hard work of many pays off only for the richest few or we can be the kind of nation where every man and woman shoulders a fair share of the burden and reaps a fair share of the reward. We can be the kind of country where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer or we can be the kind of country where middle-class families share in the opportunity and the prosperity.

President Obama has called this choice a "make or break moment" for the middle class, and tonight he will lay out a roadmap that sets us on the path to fairness instead of inequality. I look forward to hearing President Obama's vision this evening. It begins with an economy that works for every American—regardless of the size of his or her checkbook. I expect the President to lay out commonsense ideas to spur American manufacturing, create jobs, and help small businesses compete and grow. His vision is fueled by homegrown, renewable energy. It is time to stop spending American dollars on foreign oil. It is time to hire American workers to build wind turbines and next-generation vehicles. The President will propose a new plan to make sure that today's students are ready for tomorrow's jobs and that today's workers remain competitive in our global economy.

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



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I expect the President to include ideas from Democrats and from Republicans. For 3 years, the President has reached out to Republicans. Now is the time to work with him on common ideas to produce legislation, not stalemate. I ask my Republican colleagues to give his bipartisan vision the consideration it deserves.

In 1947, President Truman delivered the first televised State of the Union Message. Truman was the 20th President to govern alongside a Congress controlled by the opposing party. The first was George Washington. He said Democrats in the executive branch and Republicans in the legislative branch could and should work hand in hand to shape the Nation. This is what he said:

There are ways of disagreeing; men who differ can still work together sincerely for the common good.

I hope Republicans in Congress will keep those words in mind tonight. Despite all our differences, together we can build an economy that works for the common good of all Americans.

Mr. President, 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. McCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE PRESIDENT'S POLICIES

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, tonight the President of the United States will come to the Capitol to give us his sense of the state of the Union. This is a venerable tradition, and we welcome him. Yet it is hard not to feel a sense of disappointment even before tonight's speech is delivered because while we do not yet know all the specifics, we do know the goal. Based on what the President's aides have been telling reporters, the goal is not to conquer the Nation's problems, it is to conquer Republicans. The goal is not to prevent gridlock but to guarantee it.

Here is how the New York Times summed up the President's election-year strategy in a recent article entitled "Obama to Turn Up Attacks on Congress in Campaign." Here is the quote:

In terms of the president's relationship with Congress in 2012 . . . the president is no longer tied to Washington, D.C.

According to the story, winning a full-year extension of the cut in payroll taxes is the last—the last—"must do" piece of legislation for the White House.

Here is how a White House aide described the President's election-year strategy just a couple of weeks ago, presumably just as tonight's speech was being drafted. Referring to past displays of bipartisanship, he said:

[Then] we were in a position of legislative compromise by necessity. That phase is behind us. . . .

So, as I see it, the message from the White House is that the President has basically given up. He got nearly everything he wanted from Congress for the first 2 years of his Presidency. The results are in. It is not good. So he has decided to spend the rest of the year trying to convince folks that the results of the economic policies he put in place are somehow Congress's fault and not his.

Well, my message is this: This debate is not about what Congress may or may not do in the future, it is about what this President has already done. The President's policies are now firmly in place. It is his economy now. We are living under the Obama economy. The President may want to come here tonight and make it sound as if he just somehow walked in the door. A better approach is to admit that his 3-year experiment in big government has made our economy worse and our Nation's future more uncertain and it is time for a different approach. That is the message the American people delivered to the President in November of 2010, and they are still waiting.

The President will tell the American people tonight that he has a blueprint for the economy. What he will fail to mention is that we have been working off the President's blueprint now for 3 years—for 3 years. And what has it gotten us? Millions still looking for work, trillions in debt, and the first credit downgrade in U.S. history.

The President will propose ideas tonight that sound good and have bipartisan support. If he is serious about these proposals, if he really wants to enact them, he will encourage Democrats who run the Senate to keep them free from poison pills such as tax hikes on job creators that we know from past experience turn bipartisan support into bipartisan opposition.

If the President wants someone to blame for this economy, he should start with himself. The fact is, any CEO in America with a record like this after 3 years on the job would be graciously shown the door. This President blames the managers instead. He blames the folks on the shop floor. He blames the weather.

Well, you are certainly within your rights to walk away from the legislative process if you like, Mr. President. You can point the finger all you like. But you cannot walk away from your record.

I saw a survey the other day that contained a number of sobering findings. It was a poll of small business leaders. It said that more than 8 out of 10 of them now believe the U.S. economy is on the wrong track. Eight in

ten said they would rather have Washington stay out of the way than try to help them. Nearly 9 out of 10 said they would rather have more certainty from Washington than assistance. And it said that nearly one-third of all those surveyed said they are not hiring on account of the health care bill. One-third of them said they were not hiring on account of the health care bill. What this survey says to me is that the policies of this administration are literally crushing—crushing—the private sector. They are stifling job creation, and they are holding the economy back.

Americans want Washington to get out of the way. Yet this President continues to have the same two-word answer he has always had for seemingly every single problem we face: more government. And this is the economy we have to show for it.

Last week, the President had an opportunity to do something on his own about the ongoing jobs crisis. The only thing that stood in the way of the single biggest shovel-ready infrastructure project in America was him. The Keystone Pipeline was just the kind of project he had been calling for in speeches for months, and he said no; that one could wait. Here is a project he knew would create thousands of jobs instantly. He said no. A project that would not have cost taxpayers a dime. He said no. That would have brought more energy from our ally Canada and less from the Middle East. He said no. It all came down to one question: Was the Keystone Pipeline in the national interest? He said no.

As one columnist put it, his own standard was not the national interest, it was his own political interest. Americans want jobs, and the President is studying an election that took place 60 years ago to see how he can save his own job.

He sided with the liberal environmental base over the energy and security interests of the American people. That is exactly what we are now being told we can expect for the rest of the year.

In last year's State of the Union, the President talked about how we need to win the future—win the future. This year he just wants to win the next campaign. The President can decide he is not interested in working with Congress if his party only controls one-half of it. That is his prerogative. He can give up on bipartisanship, but we will not; our problems are too urgent. The economy is too weak. The future is too uncertain.

The President knows as well as I do that when he has called for action on things for which there exists bipartisan support, Republicans have been his strongest allies. Last year in the State of the Union, he called for free-trade agreements. We worked hard to get them done and we did. Since then he called for an extension of the highway and FAA bills and the jobs that come with them. We did both with strong bipartisan support. The President asked