



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 112th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 158

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2012

No. 24

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.

God of grace and God of glory, send Your power on Capitol Hill. May the might of Your presence provide our lawmakers with the courage and discipline to follow where You lead. Lord, guide them through their challenging decisions to the desired destination of Your purposes. As they walk on Your path, make them exemplary models of Your love and peace. Fortify their desire to live with sincerity and self-effacement for the glory of Your Kingdom.

We pray in Your sacred 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, February 14, 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.

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. REID. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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.

MEETING TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we all know the inconvenience of a few potholes as we drive down the street. It is an inconvenience. But for companies that ship \$10 trillion worth of goods across the country every year, these disintegrating roads are more than an inconvenience or more than a nuisance.

A crowded train ride to an office or a broken escalator at a station where someone is trying to pick up a subway—or what we call here Metro—may be a hassle, but for 51 million Americans who have disabilities, most of whom rely on some type of public transportation to get around, outdated stations and overcrowded trains are more than a minor inconvenience.

Mr. President, this country's deteriorating infrastructure is something we should be very concerned about. This great Nation of ours has an infrastructure that is falling apart. Our highways, our roadways, our bridges, our dams, and railways are more than an inconvenience; they are a drain on our economy. Twenty percent of America's roads don't meet safety standards.

As the Chair heard me say yesterday when I talked about some of these issues, 70,000 bridges need to be replaced or overhauled. We have bridges in America, I am told, where schoolbuses stop when they get to the bridge, have the kids walk across the bridge, then the bus comes across without the kids in it, and then off they go. They do this because they are afraid the bridge will collapse.

Our public transportation system simply can't keep up with the pace of growing ridership. Nine out of ten Americans say rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges is important—90 percent. Democrats in the Senate agree. Modernizing our transit system—rebuilding the roads American families and businesses depend upon—will help fuel our economy.

The legislation now before the Senate is too important to be bogged down with unrelated ideological amendments. Senate Republicans should not divert this bill to try to take away women's access to health care services such as contraception—something we have been dealing with over the last week—or mammograms and other cancer screenings.

Late last night we were told one of the Republican Senators wants to offer an amendment that deals with something totally unrelated to this bill, dealing with the country of Egypt. A debate on Egypt may be the right thing to do, but shouldn't we maybe start in the Foreign Relations Committee? Maybe we should start there. TV cameras can be there, and then it would not hold up this Transportation bill that is so important.

This bill will create or save 2 million jobs. It has broad bipartisan support. I have said here before, and I say it again, I so admire and respect and appreciate the work done by Senator BOXER and Senator INHOFE on this bipartisan bill. Unfortunately, our Republican House colleagues have gone in the direct opposite direction. They

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



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have a bill that is a love note to the tea party. The House bill didn't get a single Democratic vote in committee, for reasons that are very clear, obviously. The Senate bill, on the other hand, passed out of committee unanimously. Even some Republicans don't support the House bill and the way it is paid for—drilling in ANWR. Mr. President, that issue has a beard that has turned white it is so outdated—drilling in ANWR.

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood—although a Member of President Obama's Cabinet, he was a longtime Republican Congressman from Illinois—said the House legislation is the worst Transportation bill he has seen in the 35 years he has been in public service. That is our Secretary of Transportation, a Republican.

There are lots of reasons, but here are a few: The House legislation would gut public health and environmental protections, and that is a gross understatement. It would ax funding for pedestrian safety even though a pedestrian is injured or killed by a car in this country every 7 minutes. It would starve our Nation's public transportation system. The House bill reverses 30 years of good policy of dedicating funding each year for mass transit—a policy enacted in 1982 by the ultraliberal Ronald Reagan. There are ads on radio and television where we see President Reagan speaking, as he did so well, on one of his signature issues, which was doing something about the transportation system in this country. Maybe someone had read something to him or told him about General Eisenhower and how much he believed the transportation system should keep moving forward.

Many House Republicans don't support the plan to shortchange millions of Americans. I don't understand why seniors and people with disabilities, who count on public transportation, should be hurt by what the House has done in the bill they have over there.

The Chamber of Commerce and AARP have come out against the drastic approach taken by the House bill. On the other hand, the U.S. Chamber and hundreds of other organizations support the Boxer-Inhofe bill. I am disappointed House Republicans have once again chosen this very partisan path. Rebuilding a transportation system our economy can rely on shouldn't be divisive. Given the choice between working with Democrats to create good-paying jobs for American workers and playing politics, House Republicans chose politics, and that is too bad. The bill before the Senate is a good bill; we need to pass it. I am very disappointed the House has taken the road that has recently been well traveled. That is what we get from the House—the same old stuff—and we have to change.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in a

period of morning business for 1 hour. The majority will control the first half, the Republicans will control the final half.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume executive session and consideration of the Jordan nomination postcloture.

The Senate will recess from 12:30 to 2:15 for our weekly caucus meetings.

We hope to confirm the Jordan nomination today and will then resume consideration of the surface transportation bill at the earliest possible time.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE BUDGET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we have had a little more time now to look at the President's budget, and I have to say the more one looks at it, the harder it is to believe this is the President's considered response to the crisis we face.

President Obama knows better than anyone in this country that government spending and debt is completely out of control and that America is headed down the same road as Europe. This budget was his chance to show it. Instead, he decided to basically pretend these problems don't even exist, and to the extent he does acknowledge them, to propose solutions that are either gimmicks or that he knows will never come to pass.

Just to take two examples, he says he will bank savings by not fighting a war he already declared we wouldn't be fighting. He will take credit for saving money on a war that he has already declared we are not going to be fighting—a gimmick—and he would raise money with tax hikes that have been rejected eight times by both parties. And, by the way, forget the fact that government spends \$1 trillion a year more than it takes in. The President says government spending should be even higher. He significantly increases government spending at a time when we have a \$15 trillion debt, a debt that is as big as our economy.

This is what passes for leadership down at the White House. The President looks at our fiscal crisis, throws together a plan he knows is completely deceptive, and then goes on the road to sell it to captive audiences at high schools and colleges across the country. The failure of leadership is truly breathtaking. The President knows how grave our Nation's fiscal condition is. When he thinks it helps him, he admits it.

A year ago tomorrow, when debt and spending were in the news, he used his budget announcement to reiterate a pledge to cut the deficit in half. Here is what he said just a year ago tomorrow:

The only way we can make these investments in our future is if our government

starts living within its means, if we start taking responsibility for our deficits. That's why, when I was sworn in as President, I pledged to cut the deficit in half by the end of my first term. The budget I'm proposing today meets that pledge.

That was the President 1 year ago tomorrow. Here we are 1 year later and he hasn't even come close—not even close.

Last month, the President said he wanted an economy “that is built to last.” What he has given us instead is a blueprint for deficits that are built to last, and he hasn't done a thing to live up to his pledge to get our Nation's fiscal house in order. In fact, he has made it worse. Last year's budget wasn't worth the paper it was printed on and neither is this one. It is not worth the paper it was printed on.

The President's job isn't to tell people what he thinks they want to hear. It is to explain the problems we have, unite people around a solution, and get the job done. This President is truly failing the American people. The only question is how long it will take for that failure to catch up with us.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled by the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from Illinois.

THE BUDGET

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully to the statement made by the Republican minority leader about deficits, and I think it is worthy to note that history suggests an opposite conclusion from what he just said.

Remember this: The last time the Federal Government ever balanced its budget and generated a surplus was in the closing years of the Presidency of William Jefferson Clinton, a Democrat.

When President Clinton left office, the national debt accumulated over the history of the United States of America was \$5 trillion. When Clinton left office and handed the keys to President George W. Bush and said: Incidentally, next year's budget—welcome to Washington—another surplus, a \$120 billion surplus. The economy has created 23 million jobs in my 8 years, and I wish you the best. He left, turned the keys over to President George W. Bush, and gave him control for 8 years.