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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious God, infuse our Senators with the spirit of peace in the midst of the twists and turns of these uncertain times as You guide them to do what is best for this land we love. Lord, guide them beyond the meager resources of their talents so they will trust and lean on You. Give them the wisdom to believe that in every circumstance You can provide them exactly what they need. May they find opportunities to honor You in each challenge they face as You empower them to lift burdens that are heavier than they can bear.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JIM WEBB 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, December 11, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JIM WEBB, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WEBB 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 we will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour. The majority will control the first half, the Republicans the final half. Following morning business we will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 3637.

The Senate will recess as we normally do on Tuesdays from 12:30 p.m. to 2:15 p.m. to allow for our weekly caucus meetings.

At 2:15 p.m. there will a cloture vote on the motion to proceed to S. 3637. There could be additional votes today.

TRIBUTES TO DEPARTING SENATORS

JIM WEBB

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I would note the Acting President pro tempore today. I had the good fortune of being able to come to the floor last week to talk about the Acting President pro tempore's tenure in the Senate—some 6 years—and I talked about some of the many accomplishments he had in that relatively short period of time, as we call Senate time.

But I am reminded again of the Senator from Virginia, having spent an hour on Friday with Bob Kerrey. Bob Kerrey and I reflected back on his experience here in the Senate, and one memorable meeting he and I had. The purpose of that meeting was for Bob Kerrey to introduce me to Senator WEBB. It was a wonderful meeting because when the meeting finished—and I

won't go into the details of everything I said, but the Senator from Virginia knows—I came out of that meeting recognizing what kindred spirits these two gallant warriors were and are, both having been highly decorated, one in the Navy, the other a marine; one with a Medal of Honor, the other—the Acting President pro tempore—the Navy Cross, Silver Star, more than one Bronze Star for Valor, and a number of Purple Hearts.

So I say again, but I can't say it too much, what an honor and pleasure it has been to serve in this body with the Senator from Virginia, JIM WEBB. I have learned so much about what a difference a positive attitude will make. And there is no better example of that than the new GI bill of rights. To think a new Senator—a brand new Senator—would have the idea, the confidence that he could do this; not only the confidence that this bill is important, but he wrote it himself. The Acting President pro tempore wrote that bill himself. He didn't go to bill drafters, as most of us do, he wrote it himself and proceeded to get it passed. So this is a man I will miss a whole lot.

DANIEL AKAKA

Mr. President, I want to spend a little time today talking about the junior Senator from Hawaii, DANIEL AKAKA, as he retires from a life dedicated to his community and this country.

Senator AKAKA's service to this Nation began during wartime, when he was a teenager. He graduated from high school and the war was ongoing. Of course, people were watching Hawaii very closely because they had such a huge Asian population—a huge Japanese-American population. So it was watched very closely, and for reasons that weren't valid, but that is what we did then.

DAN AKAKA spent 2 years as a civilian worker with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and 2 years on active duty in the U.S. Army. His duties with the Army, as I recall, having talked to DAN

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



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AKAKA, were to protect the water in Honolulu.

After the war, DAN attended the University of Hawaii, using the original GI bill. Years later, he would receive his master's degree from the University of Hawaii as well as his bachelor's degree. Senator AKAKA believes he would never have become a U.S. Senator if not for the GI benefits he received through his service in the military. That is why, as a member and past chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, he has worked to make important improvements to the 21st Century GI Bill. Today's GI bill is modeled, after the work done by JIM WEBB, after the educational opportunity program that DAN took advantage of when he was a young boy.

Senator AKAKA was chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee from 2007 to 2010, as thousands and thousands of Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans were coming home from combat. As Democrats collectively worked to bring our troops home from Iraq, DAN AKAKA labored with the Veterans' Administration to meet the needs and challenges of a new generation of veterans. The 21st Century GI Bill ensures those veterans get the educational opportunities they deserve.

DAN so valued his own education that he went on to serve his community as a teacher after he graduated from college. He became a principal, worked for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Hawaii Office of Economic Opportunity. He served 14 years in the House of Representatives before he was appointed to the Senate in 1990. He won election to the Senate later that year.

As chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, DAN has been a strong voice and tireless advocate for Native Americans. He has taught us all about history—the history of Hawaii and its native communities, as well as the issues facing indigenous Hawaiians today.

Senator AKAKA is a descendent of native Hawaiians. He is 75 percent Hawaiian and he has Hawaiians on both sides of his family. He is very proud of his heritage. DAN was the first Native Hawaiian in the Senate.

He is also a deeply religious man who comes from a strong faith tradition. His devout mother taught her children a custom of charity. His mother was really a soft touch. Anyone coming by with a sad story, she would invite them in. Sometimes her hospitality only allowed her—because she had nothing else—to give them something to drink. His family was very poor when he was young. But DAN was able to work through this. Even if his mother had spent the grocery money for the month, strangers were always welcome at her table.

A friend of DAN's brother came to Hawaii from Chicago for a very brief period of time, and his mother took him in. He never left. He basically was raised in the Akaka home. A boy

named Anthony from Chicago, as I indicated, came to visit DAN's brother and he never left. Anthony became such a part of that family that, before he died, he wanted to make sure he was buried in Hawaii. He wanted to be buried with DAN's siblings and family in Hawaii. And he was.

Senator AKAKA served as choir director of the Hawaii Christian mother church, where his brother was minister. His brother was minister there for some 17 years. Senator AKAKA is still a member of that church.

He is blessed with a wonderful family as well as a rewarding career. He and his wife Millie have 5 children, 15 grandchildren, and 14 great-grandchildren.

Senator AKAKA has served his constituents well and with distinction. He has served not only his constituents and the State of Hawaii but our country with distinction. He has enjoyed a long and productive career and his presence in the Senate will be missed.

I offer congratulations to Senator AKAKA on his dedicated military and public service and wish him and Millie happiness in their retirement.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE FISCAL CLIFF

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, with the fiscal cliff fast approaching, I feel the need to point out something this morning that is perfectly obvious to most Americans but which Democrats in Washington still don't seem to grasp. I am referring to the fact that any solution to our spending and debt problem has to involve cuts to out-of-control Washington spending.

I know that might sound obvious to most people, but for all the President's talk about the need for a balanced approach, the truth is he and his Democratic allies simply refuse to be pinned down on any spending cuts. Americans overwhelmingly support some level of cuts to government spending as part of a plan to cut the Federal deficit. Yet the President will not commit to it. He refuses to lead on the issue. The President seems to think if all he talks about is taxes, and that is all reporters write about, somehow the rest of us will magically forget that government spending is completely out of control and that he himself has been insistent on balance.

A couple of weeks ago we saw his plan. After four straight trillion-dollar deficits and 2 years of running around calling for a balanced approach to bring those deficits under control, we saw his idea of balance—a \$1.6 trillion tax hike, new and totally unprecedented power to raise the Federal debt limit at his whim, and a \$50 billion stimulus for infrastructure; in other words, even more spending.

So when it came to offering his idea of a balanced approach, the President was vague about cuts but very specific in his request for more government spending—something no reasonable person had publicly contemplated previously. It raises the question: Do Democrats even believe their own rhetoric on spending? Or, contrary to the clear wishes of the majority of Americans, do they just want more tax revenue to fund a government without any limits—any limits whatsoever—which keeps getting bigger and bigger with every passing year?

Think about it. The Federal Government spent \$1.8 trillion in 2001, and last year—10 years later—\$3.6 trillion. These are nominal dollars, I realize, but by any measure the size of government has grown well beyond its means. Government spending is completely and totally out of control and we need to start acting like it.

Yesterday the Government Accountability Office revealed that government workers and private contractors are doing the same exact work on Medicaid claims, leading to billions in waste. Meanwhile, Senator COBURN has shown all of us some of the ridiculous things taxpayers are paying for with their tax dollars—some of the things that caused us to spend a trillion dollars more than we take in every single year.

Last year he put out a report showing how we could save more than \$100 billion—about one-tenth of the annual deficit—by eliminating duplicative and overlapping government programs. We have 94 Federal initiatives aimed at encouraging green building through 11 different Federal agencies. We have 14 programs with the sole purpose of reducing diesel emissions.

A few weeks ago Senator COBURN issued a study that showed taxpayers are funding Moroccan pottery classes, promoting shampoo and other beauty products for cats and dogs, and a video game that allows them to relive prom night.

Taxpayers also just spent \$325,000 on a robotic squirrel named Robo-Squirrel. The President just sent us a 73-page report detailing how \$60 billion in Sandy funds would be spent. Don't you think he could put together a list of spending cuts that would at least include Robo Squirrel?

We are still waiting. Why? Because for Democrats apparently every dollar in Federal spending is sacred; once secured, it can't be cut. That is why we have trillion-dollar deficits. The truth is, until the President gets specific about cuts, nobody should trust Democrats to put a dime in new revenue toward real deficit reduction or to stop their shakedown of the taxpayers at the top 2 percent. As one liberal lawmaker put it last week, that's just the beginning.

When it comes to deficit deals, the taxpayers need to trust but verify. On cuts, that means specifics.