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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, January 27, 2012, at 11 a.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26, 2012

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by Rev. James E. Smith, senior pastor of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Pioneer, LA.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Almighty God says, in 2 Chronicles, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place."

Lord, please grant our lawmakers the humility to know that complete consensus on most of the moral, religious, or political issues of these times is beyond their control. Only You, Almighty God, can move this body to seek Your wise counsel and live to honor You above all else.

As Apostle Paul says, in Ephesians, "Endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

May God bless America. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable TOM UDALL 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, January 26, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the guest Chaplain is from the State of Louisiana. It is my understanding Senator VITTER would like to say a few words, so I yield to him.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Louisiana.

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, it is my true honor and distinct pleasure—joy, really—to help host Reverend Smith today. As the Acting President pro tempore said, Reverend Smith is the senior pastor of the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Pioneer, LA. He is from Rayville, LA. All of this is in northeast Louisiana, the Monroe area.

Reverend Smith is very distinguished and has brought real hope to so many people in so many communities in that area—first of all, as a spiritual leader, the leader of his congregation and so many others; secondly, as a true leader in fighting truancy, fighting dropout rates very effectively, and also developing good jobs through many school systems. But the third point I really want to make is that I am most joyful to help host him today because he is a true and a good and a tremendously supportive friend. I know that from personal experience, from personal counsel and encouragement, and so do so many other Louisianans know that, and we cherish the reverend in that very personal way. So I am truly honored and delighted to be able to introduce the Senate to Reverend Smith.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

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



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SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following any leader remarks this morning, the Senate will begin consideration of the motion to proceed to H.J. Res. 98, which is a joint resolution relating to the disapproval of the President's exercise of authority to increase the debt limit. The time until noon will be for debate on the motion to proceed and is equally divided between the two leaders or their designees. At this time, I designate whatever time we have on this side to the chairman of the Finance Committee, Senator BAUCUS. At noon, the Senate will vote on that motion to proceed to H.J. Res. 98.

REBUILDING THE ECONOMY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in 1946 President Harry Truman delivered his first State of the Union Message. This was the first State of the Union Message since the end of World War II. The trials of war were behind us but new challenges laid ahead. Truman laid out a vision for not only how America could survive those challenges but thrive in the modern world. He described the path forward in simple words. He said:

Our basic objective—toward which all others lead—is to improve the welfare of the American people.

That meant economic prosperity. It meant Social Security and unemployment insurance. It meant an opportunity for higher education, access to medical care, and the dream of home ownership.

The goal, he wrote, was “that we become a well-housed people, a well-nourished people, an educated people, a people socially and economically secure, an alert and responsible people.” And in the three decades that followed that vision, that was reality. The middle class was never larger, never stronger, and it had never been easier to become a part of that middle class. That is the way it was. Through hard work and ingenuity, Americans prospered together.

For three decades after World War II, the rungs on the ladder to success grew closer together, but in the three decades that followed, something changed. The goal was the same—to be a well-housed, well-educated nation of responsible and economically secure people—but for many, reaching that goal became very difficult—certainly more difficult. Incomes skyrocketed for the richest few, but they stalled for the rest, and the middle class lost more and more ground.

Today, the richest 1 percent holds nearly half of all the wealth in this country. Today, the richest 1 percent takes home a quarter of all wages. Income, personal income—1 percent takes 25 percent of that. I repeat, the richest 1 percent holds nearly half of all the wealth in this country.

Americans are working just as hard as they worked 60 years ago, but that hard work is paying off for fewer and

fewer people. What does that mean? For the last three decades, the rungs on the ladder to success have grown farther apart instead of closer together, and the farther apart those rungs grow, the fewer Americans climb that ladder. The farther apart those rungs are, the fewer Americans make it into a disappearing middle class.

We just weathered the worst recession since the Great Depression, but the financial collapse of 2008 was not the cause of the problem, it was a symptom of the problem. It was a symptom of a system that is rigged to pay off for a few but leave many behind, and it is time to even the playing field.

As we rebuild our economy, let's rebuild it to last. Let's rebuild it to work for every American, regardless of the size of their bank account. This week, President Obama laid out a vision to do just that.

The President's plan will spur manufacturing. It is time to reward companies that “make it in America” and end giveaways to companies that ship jobs overseas. It will reduce our reliance on expensive foreign oil. It is time to rely on plentiful, homegrown, renewable energy sources, in spite of the fact that President Obama said that just less than 10 years ago we were importing 60 percent of the oil and now it is less than 50 percent. We are producing more oil than we have in about a decade, and that is good, but we need to make sure the future is one of renewable energy. The plan will ensure that today's students have the skills to become tomorrow's workers. That is the only way to keep pace in a competitive world economy. And it will return this country to the core value that has always made it a great country—a country of fairness. Everyone must share the prosperity as well as the responsibility, and every person and every corporation must play by the same rules. That value encouraged three decades of growth after World War II, and it can make America grow again.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make this vision of fairness a reality.

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. 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.

BURMA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to briefly discuss a trip I took re-

cently to a country that for much of the past 50 years has ranked among the world's most isolated and oppressed by its own government. Many of us wondered if things would ever change in Burma, but after my recent visit I am pleased to say that change is clearly in the air. It appears that Burma has made some progress toward democracy in the past 6 months—made more than it has in the last decade. As one who has taken a strong interest in Burma for over 20 years and as the lead author in this Chamber of an annual sanctions bill aimed at encouraging the Burmese Government to reform, I can tell you this is welcome news.

On this trip I had the opportunity and privilege to meet with a woman who for over two decades has embodied the struggle for peace in her oppressed country. After Aung San Suu Kyi's political party won 80 percent of the vote in a free and fair election back in 1995, the Burmese military regime dismissed the results and kept her under house arrest for the last 22 years—most of the time for the last 22 years confined at home. Scores of other political reformers during that period were jailed or tortured, and the regime waged a brutal campaign against ethnic minorities, driving many of them out of their homes and into refugee camps. But by her courage and her patience that justice delayed would not be justice denied, Aung San Suu Kyi has kept the hope of freedom in her country alive. I have long admired her from afar. She once took a great risk to smuggle out of Burma a letter thanking me for my support, a letter I have proudly kept to this day. But never did I think I would get to meet the Nobel laureate in person. It was quite a moment.

Following an election in 2010 that was widely thought to be unfree and unfair, the new civilian government in Burma, to the surprise of many of us, has made undeniably positive steps toward reform. In addition to releasing Suu Kyi from house arrest, scores of other political prisoners have been freed. During my visit last week, I spoke with two who had just been released days before my arrival.

One of the longest standing armed conflicts in the world—the Burmese Government's campaign against the ethnic minority called the Karen—has apparently been brought to a close. Many Karen people who fled Burma now call Kentucky home. I had the chance to meet with many of them and other refugees from Burma, now resettled in Kentucky, at Louisville's Crescent Hill Baptist Church this past Saturday. I enjoyed meeting with those folks and was pleased to relay to them the same message I share with my colleagues today that change is indeed in the air in their country.

Because of all of these positive developments, I applaud Secretary Clinton's recent decision to exchange ambassadors with Burma for the first time in 20 years. Of course, the Government of Burma still has a substantial way to go