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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God of love, may Your presence fill our lawmakers with Your wisdom and power. May Your wisdom lead them away from the pitfalls of delayed obedience so that they will seek to promptly do Your will. Lord, make them a source of strength. Direct their actions; motivate their hearts, as they seek to begin this day with an unreserved commitment to You. God, give them Your supernatural power, wisdom, and guidance, for You know them, their needs, their motives, their hopes, and their fears.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND 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. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 19, 2012.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

BRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND 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. Madam President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour; the Republicans will control the first half, the majority the second half.

Following morning business, we will resume consideration of the supplemental appropriations bill. I mentioned last night we are going to have to move forward on this bill. I have been told the Republicans want to have a substitute, and we look forward to whatever that might be. We can set up a series of votes to satisfy those people who want to change this bill in some manner.

I would note that in the Northeast—other States but principally New York and New Jersey—there are about 700,000 people who have lost their homes. Tens of thousands of those homes have been destroyed, and other people are still living in very difficult situations.

When we had the devastation in the Gulf, we got the aid to those States very quickly. The population of those States—Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama—is very sparse compared to New York and New Jersey. We have to make a decision on this very important legislation before we leave this week, and we are going to do that. I hope everyone would cooperate, but we have to do

this. It is very unfair to the millions of people who are suffering as a result of this devastation.

We have had some devastating wildfires in the West. They are terribly damaging to the environment and on occasion there is lost life and often there are property losses. But relatively speaking, compared to the millions of people involved in this storm, we have to get our priorities right. It is unfair to those people who are suffering. It is not only individual people, but it is also businesses. I hope we can finalize this matter in the next day or two.

TRIBUTES TO DEPARTING SENATORS

KENT CONRAD

Mr. REID. Madam President, it is often said a man is only as good as his word. In this new world we live in, the same applies to women. This is a world we live in where men and women, as much as we can, are treated equally. A good man is somebody who has his word that is good. A good woman is a person who has their word that is good. I believe that is true.

If that fact is true, then Mr. KENT CONRAD, the Senior Senator from North Dakota, is a good man, indeed.

When he was running for the Senate the first time, he promised the people of North Dakota he would not run for reelection if the Nation's budget deficit was higher at the end of his term than at the beginning of it.

We came to the Senate together. I can remember 27 years ago in the LBJ Room where I first met KENT CONRAD—we were running for the Senate—this studious man, very intense. I can still remember that. We have been friends now for all those many years. But think what he did. He could have been reelected so easily and he probably could have figured out some way around it: It was my intention to reduce the debt, but we weren't able to do it.

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



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But he didn't follow that path. He said: I am not running for reelection, and he didn't. It is amazing what he did. He takes the national debt personally. He takes it very seriously. Kent announced he wouldn't seek reelection. I was stunned. KENT, how could you do that? He said: I gave my word. But fate, as we know—and we are feeling it today with these flowers here behind me—fate is rarely anticipated. After his first term was set to expire and he had announced he wasn't running for reelection, Quentin Burdick, with whom I had the pleasure of serving, died, and so he ran for his seat and was elected. So he has held both Senate seats in North Dakota. He ran in that special election to replace Senator Burdick and won. The Senate, the people of North Dakota, and every American who cares about controlling the Federal debt have benefited from his faithful service.

Every time we have done something dealing with the debt in the last 26 years, KENT CONRAD has been at the forefront. ObamaCare, he was on top of that. He was one of the Gang of 6, it was called at the time, and took months and months. He came up, of course, with the magnificent idea, he and Judd Gregg—two people who know the finances of this country as well as any other two men in the world—they were going to do something about it, and they introduced legislation. It was patterned after the base closing commissions. They would do their work—the Commission—come back to the Senate, no filibusters, no amendments. That was KENT CONRAD and Judd Gregg's idea. As we know, the problem was the Republicans who supported the legislation, cosponsored it, wouldn't let us get it on the floor; six or seven of them voted against that. The Bowles-Simpson Commission; the Obama-Boehner talks, two rounds of those; Biden-Cantor, he was involved in every one of those; the Gang of 6, the Gang of 8. Even though he wasn't personally one of the three people on the supercommittee, Chairperson MURRAY was leaning on him all the time for information.

He has been terrific. As chairman of the Budget Committee, no one could do more than he did. I can remember he managed the bills we had on getting budgets. He was here, my seat was there, and he wanted me to help him. Why? Because he didn't have time to deal with procedure. He was dealing with substance. I still joke with him about this. He was so intense; we could see that mind of his working. So he was happy I was here working with him to get the budgets through.

He has been a powerful voice against runaway deficits but always being totally reasonable, recognizing that we are in a time of economic slowdown and we have to do something about the debt. But he also believes that during any of these periods of time, we need stimulation of the economy; they go together.

As I have indicated, no one cares more about addressing the national debt than Senator CONRAD. But he also understands the balance between fiscal responsibility and funding our national priorities.

KENT CONRAD has been bipartisan. Sometimes some criticize him for being so bipartisan. He has never been afraid to reach across the aisle to keep our country on a responsible path. He is a person who is not an ideologue. I could be wrong, but I think he was the first person to endorse Obama. Obama was a Senator who gave indication he wanted to run for President. I think Senator CONRAD was the first to endorse him. We know Senator Obama didn't sell very well in North Dakota, but that didn't stop KENT CONRAD. He thought he was the best person to be President of the United States.

The proposal I mentioned with Senators CONRAD and Gregg was a blueprint for what the Bowles-Simpson Commission then came up with. As I have indicated, every bipartisan deficit reduction since then—and some partisan efforts—anytime there was involvement with the debt, he was there.

Although we have yet to reach a solution or a conclusion to the very serious fiscal challenges this country faces, I credit KENT CONRAD for the progress we have made to this point. He will continue to be a voice for reason and moderation even in his retirement. See, KENT has always had a brilliant mind for numbers. He is a step above an accountant's mind. I truly like accountants. My daughter-in-law is an accountant, but he is a step above that. He is of the mathematician's caliber; he is so very smart.

After graduating from college, he worked for the North Dakota State Tax Commission. The person who ran that tax commission was Byron Dorgan, who later joined him in the Senate. In 1980, KENT succeeded Byron as the commissioner of taxes in North Dakota. They are the best of friends. He served as tax commissioner for 6 years.

He is a fifth-generation North Dakotan, born in Bismarck. KENT CONRAD was raised by his grandparents. When he was 5 years old, his parents were killed by a drunk driver and so he was raised by his wonderful grandparents and he has told me so many times about how good they were to him.

He was always interested in politics. At his retirement party, he talked about coming to Washington, DC, and he went back to his room or wherever he went that evening and wrote on a piece of paper that he was going to be a Senator. He was just a boy, a little kid. He was a teenager, but at least in my view of a 16-year-old today he was still a little kid. He said he wanted to be a Senator to himself. "It so inspired me that I thought someday I'd like to be down on that floor and I'd like to debate the great issues of the day."

He has done it. He has done it for 24 years.

Today KENT doesn't just debate the great issues of the day, he also is fa-

mous for making sure people understand what he is talking about. He has visual aids—we call them charts—that explain all his numbers and make them understandable. In 2001, the Rules Committee gave him his own printer since he was producing more charts than all the rest of the Senators combined—and that is the truth. He is famous for his charts.

He is renowned for his dog. He loves that little dog named Dakota. It is a fluffy white dog, a bijon frise. Everywhere KENT goes, Dakota is with him. They love that dog like only people can love animals. I often question how—I used to question; I don't anymore. I have a daughter. My oldest child is a daughter. She is allergic to cats. Her husband, trying to be nice to her, bought her a cat that had no hair. Frankly, it was kind of an ugly little animal, but my daughter loves that cat. They named the cat Olivia. The cat got out at night—they live in a suburb here—and a racoon attacked the cat so the cat was never the same after that. But my daughter spent lots of money on this cat.

I finally said: Lana, why are you spending money on the cat?

She said: Dad, I love that animal.

So that was the beginning; I don't question it anymore. If my daughter feels that strongly about a cat, I am going to stop criticizing people who spend money on animals.

I am reminded of my daughter every day I see him with Dakota because she loved Olivia like he loves Dakota. He and his lovely wife Lucy have spent lots of money on that little dog. They love that dog. He calls him Little Guy; that Little Guy.

I am going to miss KENT a lot. He is my friend, my pal. I wish him and his family well. He has a lovely family. His wife Lucy was the long-time chief of staff for Byron Dorgan—two Senators, both representing the same State, one Senator's wife is the chief of staff for his colleague. She went out in the private sector fairly recently and has done a great job. She has been involved in Major League Baseball. She and KENT love baseball. KENT always talks about he talked to Pete Angelos, the owner of the Baltimore Orioles; that he is looking forward to his retirement because Angelos promised him a tryout. He is going to try to play professional baseball. He loves baseball. They go to spring training when they can. I hope they will still have a presence in Washington. I think so much of both of them. They are wonderful people.

They have two children, a daughter who wrote a book about politics, and one grandson. KENT always boasts about how smart his daughter is. I went to the book signing. I am sure she is smart because she has such a brilliant father.

I value both KENT's friendship and leadership. While he will be missed in the Senate, he should rest assured that his legacy will remain long after he leaves.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

PREVENTING FURTHER ECONOMIC DAMAGE

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, there is still time to prevent further damage to the economy and to stop the automatic tax hike on every American that's scheduled to go into effect at the beginning of the New Year. The President has a real opportunity, the second in 2 years, to do something significant about our debt crisis and jumpstart our economy. He has a real opportunity to show he can govern. He is letting that opportunity slip away.

Senate Democrats and the White House now say that a "balanced approach" is one that can pass both the House and Senate. But we know that neither the Democrat bill in the Senate, nor the President's plan for more than a trillion dollars in tax hikes meets their own new test of 'balance.'

Speaker BOEHNER, like me, would like to prevent a tax hike on everyone. But given the President's failure to act, the House will soon vote on legislation to prevent a tax hike on anyone making less than a million dollars a year—rather than letting taxes go up on every American taxpayer; in other words, a plan that 53 of our Democrat colleagues here in the Senate already voted to support. It is a plan that would ensure far more American families and small businesses are protected from tax hikes than anything our Democrat friends have proposed.

Democrats will have an opportunity to offer and vote on changes if they no longer agree with their previous positions. But what they cannot do is sit on their hands and let taxes go up on every American taxpayer. Senate Democrats have wasted precious time all year with show votes designed to fail. That has left us with little time to do the real work that needs to be done. But there is still enough time for us to finish all of our work before this weekend, if we are all willing to stay late and work hard. For the sake of the people who sent us here, it can and should be done.

TRIBUTES TO DEPARTING SENATORS

JIM DEMINT

Madame President, I would like to speak this morning in tribute to an unexpected addition to the list of retirees on the Republican side of the Senate, Senator JIM DEMINT of South Carolina.

They say success has many fathers, but it is hard to think of anyone who has done more than JIM DEMINT to raise the public's awareness on spending and debt, and the threat that big government poses to our liberties.

JIM has been a powerful voice for conservatism during his time in the

House and the Senate. I have no doubt he will be extremely effective in his new post over at the Heritage Foundation. I wish him every success. Because the truth is, the Nation simply cannot continue on its current path, and if JIM can help more people understand that from his new perch on Massachusetts Avenue, then it will clearly have been worth it.

And so while JIM's voice will be missed here in the Senate, we are glad to see he will be putting his considerable talents to good use by helping to arm his former colleagues and many others with the arguments they will need to make the case for constitutional conservatism in the years ahead.

As a young boy, JIM developed a knack for sales by necessity. His mom ran a ballroom dancing school out of their home as a way to keep food on the table for her four children, and part of JIM's job was to recruit the students. He says he still runs into people who attended the DeMint Academy of Dance and Decorum. "Our home sometimes seemed like boot camp," JIM once said, because to survive as a single parent his mom enlisted all four kids for daily duties starting at 6 a.m. It was "the closest I would come to basic training." Interestingly, part of JIM's responsibilities involved filling in for folks who did not have a dance partner.

When JIM wasn't busy in the ballroom, he was working his two paper routes or bagging groceries at the grocery store. On weekends, he fed his love of music as the drummer for a band called "Salt and Pepper." He was best known for his vocals on the song "Wipe-out" and the song's distinctive opening cackle. JIM says he could have been a rock star, if it weren't for the fact that he had no voice or musical talent. So as an adult, he stuck with sales, and it was from there that he launched his political career.

It has not been easy. JIM has always worked hard to ensure that Debbie and the kids remained at the center of his life. I know how much he admires Debbie for keeping her focus on their kids over the years. Theirs has been a true partnership almost since the day they first met all the way back in the seventh grade.

JIM was not always all that political. In fact, those who know him best say that one of the most surprising things about his career is how such a shy and gentle spirit could be viewed by so many as a take-no-prisoners firebrand. As a young marketing executive, he recalls thinking that he had a wife, kids and a business—and that was basically his universe. He did not even know who his congressman was. To this day, one of the things JIM enjoys doing most is working on his lawn back in Greenville. And while he has gotten his share of awards in Washington over the years, I don't think any of them compare with the one his neighborhood association gave him a few years back for "best lawn." He is really proud of that one.

JIM's interest in politics came about when the government started to intrude more and more into his business, and when he started to notice how it unwittingly harmed others. "The more I learned about how things operated," he once said, "the more I understood how problems in our society such as broken homes, crime, and school drop-out were a direct result of well-intended but misdirected government policies."

So he got involved.

In 1992, Bob Inglis walked into his office and asked for his help in running a race in South Carolina's 4th District. JIM took the job and for the first time began to think about running for political office himself. When Inglis retired, JIM decided to run as his replacement. He was 47 years old, he had never run for anything in his life, and Debbie thought he was crazy. But the voters liked what he was selling, and so did his colleagues in the House. They voted him President of their freshman class in 1999.

Six years later, JIM was elected to the Senate. And he has been a leader here as well, working to cut Federal spending and reform how we spend taxpayer dollars. A conservative stalwart, JIM leaves with a stellar 98.77 lifetime rating from the American Conservative Union. And, crucially, he has made a difference. One member of the press corps once referred to JIM as the patron saint of lost causes in the Senate. And, frankly, I don't think we will be abolishing the tax code anytime soon, as JIM has suggested, but that's to miss the point. Great causes almost always start out with a constituency of one, and JIM has never been afraid to take up important and unpopular causes early, and let the polls and punditry take care of themselves.

After becoming what he called a "recovering earmarker," he succeeded in convincing others to give up the practice. As a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, he was also instrumental in resolving a serious problem in Honduras a few years ago after the Obama Administration misconstrued the legal ouster of a president with a political coup. JIM enlisted Miguel Estrada to figure out what was really going on down there, and I was happy to help him travel to Honduras to investigate in person. JIM soon reported back that it was instantly obvious it was not a coup. The story eventually had a happy ending: the Honduran people held a new election and inaugurated a new president and the Obama administration grudgingly backed down. But none of this would have happened without the leadership of Senator DEMINT. "The senator kept the administration honest," Estrada later said. "He was invaluable."

Senator DEMINT and I share a profound commitment to free speech, and he has written eloquently on its importance for our Nation. "Good government," he has written, "is a result of freedom debated." He has called the