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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable WILLIAM M. COWAN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray:

Eternal God, we place our hopes in You for our future is in Your hands. Strong deliverer, be our shelter in these challenging times. Lord, give our lawmakers the understanding, humility, and clarity they need to keep America strong. May they be good stewards of the generous gifts you have showered upon our land, laboring valiantly to assure that justice and righteousness will prevail. Help them to commit their plans to You, believing that You know what is best for our Nation and world. We pray in Your gracious Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable WILLIAM M. COWAN 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, March 12, 2013.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable WILLIAM M. COWAN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. COWAN 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 morning business until 12:30 today. The majority will control the first 30 minutes, the Republicans the second 30 minutes. Chairman MIKULSKI and Ranking Member SHELBY are expected to make opening statements about 11 o'clock this morning.

Just as an aside, this is a new day in the Senate. We are so grateful for the hard work of Senators MIKULSKI and SHELBY. The amendment is offered as their substitute amendment. I am very proud of the work they did. We are going to have to work through a number of amendments, but when it is all over, we are going to send over a bill I hope the House will accept. If not, we will have a quick conference—I hope that is not necessary—and continue the work on our other appropriations bills and finish the problems we have had in being behind.

The CR will fund the government until October 1. We hope by then we can complete work on our appropriations bills, so in 2014 we don't have to go through all this again—CRs and omnibuses and all that kind of stuff.

We are going to recess from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. today for weekly caucus meetings. We have extended that for an extra 15 minutes because the President is going to be here today.

We expect to begin consideration of H.R. 933, which is the appropriations bill I just talked about, following the caucus meetings we are going to have.

THE RYAN BUDGET

Mr. REID. Earlier this year, with November election losses fresh in their minds, top Republicans promised a kinder, gentler Republican Party, a Republican Party that cared about "every American . . . achieving their dreams." Republicans banded about words such as "fairness" and "opportunity." They made overtures toward women and Hispanics. They promised cooperation and an end to brinkmanship. House Majority Leader CANTOR even spoke of "an agenda based on a shared vision of creating the conditions for health, happiness, prosperity for more Americans and their families."

Rebranding, we thought, was underway. Then a few weeks passed and the Republican emphasis on fairness and equity made a direct U-turn back to where they started. Today the House Budget Committee Chairman PAUL RYAN will unveil an extreme budget that is anything but balanced. This budget reflects the same skewed priorities the Republican Party has championed for years, the same skewed priorities Americans rejected in November. The Ryan budget will call for more tax breaks for the wealthy, an end of Medicare as we know it, and Draconian cuts to education and other programs to help America's economy grow and prosper.

We have heard it many times and I will repeat it. Yogi Berra famously said, "It's déjà vu all over again," and it really is. We have seen this before, déjà vu all over again. The Ryan budget will shower more tax breaks on millionaires and continue to tilt the playing field to the advantage of big corporate interests and raise taxes for the middle class.

I know Congressman RYAN is held out to be this guru who understands things so well. What he understands is gimmickry and that is what he has done so well. He has pulled the wool over the eyes of those people in the House and they continue following him, but his

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



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budget is anything but balanced, anything but fair. Members of the House should look at what they are being led into—or out of.

This plan, just like last year, refused to close a single tax loophole in order to reduce the deficit. Yet it guts investments in education, health care, public safety, scientific research, and job-creating clean energy technology. The Ryan budget would end the Medicare guarantee and force seniors into a voucher program. It would ax preventive health care such as cancer screenings and charge seniors more for prescriptions and further reduce the funding for food inspectors, police, and first responders generally. As if protecting the wealthy special interests is not bad enough, the Republican budget also devastates the economy, costing jobs and slowing economic growth.

Not only is this a wrong approach, it is the same old approach. To make matters worse, the Paul Ryan Budget No. 3—he has done it two other times—used the same fuzzy math and gimmickry as his previous two budgets, relies on accounting that is creative at best and fraudulent at worst to inflate its claims of deficit reduction. We believe it is critical to stabilize the deficit, but it will take more than accounting gimmicks to achieve real deficit reduction.

At a time when corporations are making record profits, the stock market is soaring, and wealthy Americans' income continues to rise, the deficit reduction should not have to be at the expense of middle-class families, senior citizens, and the poor. Americans have demanded a fair approach to deficit reduction for all Americans—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. They want a fair approach to deficit reduction that makes sensible cuts and asks profitable corporations and the wealthiest among us to share the burden—balanced.

We have been listening. That is why this week Budget Committee Chair PATTY MURRAY will introduce a budget that reflects those balanced priorities. Her plan, the Democratic plan, will cut wasteful spending and reduce the deficit, close tax loopholes that benefit the rich, and invest where the economy needs to grow, to go really hard, to continue to build, to grow. It will create a strong middle class.

Congressman RYAN and his Republican colleagues in Congress have taken a different approach, an approach that makes it plain they missed the message in the November elections. Their budget once again will put moneyed special interests ahead of middle-class families, and no amount of rebranding will hide that.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

BUDGET PREVIEW

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as we know, President Obama missed this year's legal deadline to submit a budget to Congress, just like he has nearly every year of his presidency. But this year it is even worse—we now know he does not even plan to submit a budget until after the House and the Senate have acted to pass one.

That has never happened in the more than 90 years that have gone by since the modern budgeting process was established in the 1920s. Somehow, Presidents managed to submit budgets on time in the middle of World War II, during the Great Depression—but not today? There is simply no excuse.

Rather than helping lead Congress toward a reasonable outcome, it appears the President is happy to drop a bomb on the congressional budget process instead by releasing his budget plan after the House and Senate have acted—presumably so he can campaign against Republicans if the process fails as he hopes. Let's hope he does not trot out that tired political playbook again.

The President should send over his budget now—not next week or next month, but today—so both sides can consider it at a time when it might be helpful, rather than destructive, to the process.

And speaking of serious delays, for 4 years my constituents in Kentucky and Americans across the country have been asking Senate Democrats a simple question: "Where's the budget?" Most families put one together. They want to know what Democrats who run the Senate have planned.

But for 4 years, Senate Democrats have ignored these concerns. Year after year, they have neglected one of their most important legislative responsibilities.

Evidently that is about to change. Senate Democrats are now pledging to finally—finally—produce a budget. I will be interested to see what they put forward.

I hope Senate Democrats take this exercise seriously and propose real spending reforms that can put our country on a stronger, more sustainable fiscal path, reforms that can control spending and lead to robust private-sector growth and job creation. We will see.

What about Republicans? Well, Republicans lead the House, and they have proposed budgets every year, right on schedule—budgets that would finally put our country on a path to growth and job creation, and that would put our creaky entitlement programs on a sound fiscal footing so they are around when people need them.

Today, House Republicans will unveil this year's budget blueprint. If the past is any indication, the reforms it contains would jump-start our economy, help more Americans join the middle class, and begin to tackle the debt that threatens all of our futures because Republicans understand we need to grow the economy, not the government.

What's more, it would get us back to a balanced budget within just a few short years.

Call me a skeptic, but there is little chance the budget my Senate Democrat friends put forward will balance—either today, 10 years from today, or ever. And I doubt it will contain much in the way of spending reform either. We will probably just get more of what we have come to expect from them the past few years: lots of budget gimmickry, tons of wasteful spending, and even more tax hikes. That type of budget won't grow the economy or shrink the debt.

But here is the thing. The budgeting process is a great way for both parties to outline their priorities for the country, and that is something Senate Democrats have refused to do until now.

So, if they want to put forward a budget that allows Medicare to go bankrupt, that hikes up taxes on the families and small businesses that can least afford them, and that proposes a future of massive deficits without end—if that is really how they want to define themselves for the American people—then let the battle of ideas begin.

But we need to see their budget first, so it is time to end the years of delays and put those ideas on the table. And it is well past time for the President to do the same—not after Congress acts, but before.

Republicans have managed to play by the rules every year and produce serious budgets for our country. I hope Democrats are finally ready to get to work to do the same.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first 30 minutes and Republicans controlling the second 30 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I understand that the Democrats have the first half of morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is correct.

CONTRASTING BUDGETS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this is a historic week because we will see congressional presentations of the congressional budgets, and I believe we will see stark contrasts.