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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ, a Senator from the State of Hawaii.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Hear our voice, O God, and listen to our prayer. You know our inward thoughts even before we think them. As we place our trust in You, enable us to experience Your joy. Breathe upon our Senators the fresh Spirit of Your love that old things will become new and the darkness will turn to dawn. Amid the dangers and destruction in our world, give us the miracle of Your peace. Make us good stewards of the gifts You have given us.

And, Lord, we ask You to comfort the victims and families affected by the explosions in West, TX.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, April 18, 2013.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable BRIAN SCHATZ, a Sen-

ator from the State of Hawaii, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SCHATZ 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 resume consideration of the gun safety legislation. The time until noon will be equally divided and controlled for debate on the Barrasso and Harkin amendments.

At noon there will be two votes in relation to those amendments.

Following the votes the Senate will recess until 2 p.m. to allow for some important caucus meetings.

At 2 p.m. the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the Torres and Watson nominations.

At about 2:15 p.m., then, there will be a rollcall vote on confirmation of the Torres nomination and an expected voice vote on confirmation of the Watson nomination.

EXPLOSION IN WEST, TEXAS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there was a new tragedy during the night, and our thoughts are with the people of West, TX. Our thoughts are with all of Texas in the wake of a terrible explosion of a fertilizer factory in the town, as I have indicated, of West, just outside of Waco. The extent is being estimated at this time—5 to 15 dead, a couple hundred who were injured.

But I am troubled and feel so badly about those who were hurt. They were working. They were sleeping. They were having dinner. I offer my con-

lences to those who lost loved ones and those who have people who were injured.

We will continue to follow the news from Texas as it develops today. I am going to do everything I can with my colleagues to ensure that this terrible tragedy has the resources of the Federal Government available to help the people of that city as they recover from this tragedy.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this Nation has simply dealt with too much—too much—loss during these last few months. Once again I offer my condolences to the families who joined us here yesterday to honor the loved ones they lost to gun violence and to lobby for stronger background checks. The mothers and fathers of the murdered children from Newtown were here, family and friends of those who were injured and killed in Aurora, CO, were here. We had people here from the tragedy where 32, 33 people were killed in Blacksburg, VA, at Virginia Tech. They were here yesterday.

We knew the effort to keep America's streets safe from gun violence would not be easy. I commend Senator MANCHIN and others for setting aside partisanship to negotiate this compromise. Unfortunately, even though we got a strong, strong majority vote—well over 50—55 Senators voted in favor of this. And FRANK LAUTENBERG came. He had not been here for a while. He has been ill. He voted. We voted with a strong majority to change things here in America so that people who have serious mental illness would have to have a background check before they can buy a gun or that criminals would have to have a background check before they can buy a gun.

Even people who are selling the guns think there should be some background check. The man who sold the gun to the man who walked into the courthouse in Las Vegas and blasted away—

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



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that man who sold that gun said he sold guns to lots of people who were bad people, but he did it legally. He thinks the law should be changed. So the vast majority of the Senate agreed that should be the case. But we could not get to 60, the magic number here in the Senate.

Yesterday the families of gun violence victims watched as Republicans defeated a commonsense proposal to expand background checks that has the support of 90 percent of Americans.

But make no mistake, the debate is not over. This is not the end of the fight. Republicans are in an unsustainable position—crosswise with 9 out of 10 Americans.

In an event we did out this backdoor yesterday, Senator SCHUMER said—I think he summed it up about as well as you could when he said: America today on background checks is in about the same place America was a few years ago dealing with immigration, gay marriage, and things related to gender equality.

I believe Senator SCHUMER is right. This is the beginning, and it has to happen. Anytime in America, on those rare occasions when 90 percent of the American people agree something should be done, it should be done. And it will be done. It is only a question of time.

The brand of the Republicans is further tarnished by going against what 90 percent of the American people want. Democrats will continue to stand with the families from Newtown, Aurora, Tucson, Carson City, and I assure the 90 percent of Americans who support meaningful background check legislation that I personally will continue this fight.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Senate suffered a notable and stunning defeat of bipartisanship this week during the debate over background checks. They said a week ago we would never get on the bill, but the Senate joined together and we got on the bill. Then yesterday, as I have indicated earlier, we got a significant majority of the Senate voting to move forward on this background check. Ninety percent of the Democrats, which is in keeping with the American people, and four valiant Republicans joined to put us where we are today.

But the week did not bring only bad news from the legislative front. A bipartisan group of eight of my Senate colleagues—it would never have happened a few years ago, but it is going to happen now. As I indicated, quoting Senator SCHUMER, background checks is about where immigration was just a few years ago. A bipartisan group of my Senate colleagues—four Democrats and four Republicans—from all different political persuasions introduced a comprehensive plan to reform our broken immigration system. Senators SCHUMER, MCCAIN, DURBIN, MENENDEZ,

GRAHAM, BENNET, RUBIO, and FLAKE worked very hard on this legislation. All one needs to do is look at the legislative pedigree of these eight Senators. They are all over the book—liberal, conservative, moderate. And that is the way it should be.

I commend each of them for setting partisanship aside—both Democrats and Republicans setting partisanship aside—on an issue that is critical to our great Nation. The four Democrats did not get everything I wanted in that legislation they now have before the American people. They did not give me, they did not give Democrats everything they wanted in these negotiations. But, as I have said on this floor numerous times, that is what legislating is. It is the art of compromise. It is not the art of getting everything you want.

I have been in this body a long time, and I have been very fortunate to put my name on things that have passed here, and I have helped guide things through this Senate in the last many years. I have to on occasion swallow hard and say: Well, we are going to have to compromise here to get this done.

That is what we need to do. People have been in a situation where they have been unwilling to compromise. There are things that have happened in the great history of this body that have come by compromise. I have never ever gotten everything I wanted. Republicans in these negotiations dealing with immigration, I guarantee you, did not get everything they wanted, just as Democrats did not.

But I am satisfied with this legislation. It continues to secure our borders, the northern and southern borders. It improves our dysfunctional legal immigration system. Our immigration system is broken, and has been for quite some time, and needs to be fixed.

Another thing that is important, it requires 11 million people who are undocumented to pass a criminal background check, pay fines, start on a path to citizenship, and, yes, learn English. It does not put them at the head of the line; it puts them at the back of the line. It takes about 12 or 13 years to finally get up there. But at least the program is moving forward. I look forward to hearings on this measure that will be led by Senator LEAHY.

Mr. President, I want to take a minute to commend Chairman LEAHY. He is the most senior Member of the Senate, he is the President pro tempore of the Senate, but he also has an important responsibility as chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

The reason we were able to get the legislation on the floor that we have been working on this past few weeks is because of Senator LEAHY, because he had his committee—even though, as I have just indicated, Senator LEAHY did not agree with everything that came out of that committee of his; he comes from the State of Vermont which is

much different than other places people on that committee come from around the country, but he brought it forward, and everything we voted on as the base bill came out of that committee.

It is the same as is going to happen on immigration. Senators—these eight—a significant number of them want to do hearings. They want to have a markup. Other Senators said: Let's just move to the floor. Well, there are a number of Senators who believe it should come out of the committee first, so that is what is going to happen. So I commend Senator LEAHY for agreeing to do this.

He is going to have a hearing tomorrow and another one on Monday. He has estimated a time for the markup. So I commend him for his leadership with Judiciary.

I repeat, I look forward to hearings on this measure before the committee, and to a thoughtful debate on the Senate floor.

We are going to have ample time to discuss and consider this legislation. I am going to do what I can to get this bill across the finish line, which I think we are going to do. I think we are going to do it pretty soon.

MAIL SAFETY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we deal with a lot of controversial things. That is the way it has always been here. We deal with controversial issues that elicit passionate responses, including the immigration proposal I just outlined and the antiviolenence legislation I talked about earlier. We try to deal with these issues thoughtfully and with respect. Those who serve and work in the Senate do so out of a sense of patriotism and a love of country.

I disagree with a number of my Republican Senators. JEFF SESSIONS and I—I do not think we have ever voted on anything the same way, but I have tremendous respect for him as a person. He does what he believes is right. His colleague from Alabama, RICHARD SHELBY, is one of my dear friends. He and I do not vote much alike, but our relationship is one of respect and admiration for each other. That is what we have to do in this body.

I never question the patriotism or love of country of any Senator because if I did, I would be wrong. So it was deeply disturbing that an anonymous individual would attempt to send deadly poison to Senate offices as well as the White House. It appears that with the swift action of the Capitol Police and Federal law enforcement officials, the suspect in these cowardly, anonymous attacks has been apprehended. I hope he will be brought to justice very soon.

We should all understand that incident does not appear in any way to be related to the tragedy in Boston. Nevertheless, it is a reminder to the Senate community and to all Americans to remain vigilant during these unsettling