



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 160

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MARCH 6, 2014

No. 38

Senate

The Senate met at 9:33 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's prayer will be offered by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

PRAYER

His Holiness the Dalai Lama offered the following prayer:

Firstly, as usual, I am a Buddhist monk—a simple Buddhist monk—so we pray to Buddha and all other Gods.

With our thoughts we make our world. Our mind is central and precedes our deeds. Speak or act with a pure mind, and happiness will follow you like a shadow that never leaves.

May there be joy in the world, with bountiful harvest and spiritual wealth. May every good fortune come to be, and may all our wishes be fulfilled. As long as space remains, and as long as sentient beings remain, until then, may I too remain and help dispel the misery of the world.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

WELCOMING HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my pleasure to welcome to the Senate his Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. I know I speak for the entire Senate family when I express our gratitude for the prayer to open the Senate and his words of encouragement and his blessing.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is well known throughout the world as the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and for spreading the gospel of peace, compassion, and love to our fellow human beings. But it is the tradition when the Senate welcomes a guest Chaplain to say a few words about the honored guest.

My friendship with His Holiness has roots from a good man from California by the name of Richard Blum who has done more, in my opinion, to help the Tibetan people and His Holiness than anyone else. His Holiness often says that he is only a simple monk born to a farming family in northeastern Tibet.

To millions of people in Tibet and across the globe, he is much more. He is a source of hope and inspiration in a world that can sometimes seem very dark. When he was only 2 years old, His Holiness was recognized as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama. Four years later, when he was a little boy, he began his monastic education. He studied logic, art, Tibetan culture, and Buddhist philosophy, among many other things.

At age 23 he passed his exam with honors and was awarded what would be an equivalent of a Ph.D., a doctorate of Buddhist philosophy. For more than half a century, the Dalai Lama has been traveling the world raising awareness about the concerns of 6 million fellow Tibetans—as he would say: Making new friends around the world.

In Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, the Dalai Lamas, all of them, are enlightened beings who have postponed their own nirvana, or liberation from the cycle of reincarnation, in order to serve humanity. This particular enlightened being has chosen to serve humanity by spreading a message of peace.

He motivates countless people around the world, people of every faith, to practice compassion toward one another. His Holiness urges us all: “Be

kind whenever possible. It is always possible.” The Dalai Lama's teachings contain lessons from people around the world and certainly within this Chamber. His Holiness also advises us: “The best way to resolve any problem in the human world is for all sides to sit down and talk.” Pretty simple, but very true. It is advice that those of us fortunate enough to serve our country and our constituents in the Senate should take to heart and follow.

The presence of His Holiness in this Chamber today inspires me as I hope it does all of us to renew our commitment to speak and act with a pure mind and to help dispel the misery of the world.

CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED—Resumed

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 309, S. 1086.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1086) to reauthorize and improve the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30, with Republicans controlling the first half and the majority the final half. Following morning business, the Senate will proceed to executive session. At 11:20, there will be up to three rollcall votes on executive nominations. Following those votes, there will be 2 hours of debate on the military sexual assault bills. At about 2 p.m., there will be a series of rollcall votes in relation to the military sexual assault bills. We also expect to consider additional executive nominations which may require votes later in the day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). The Senator from Vermont.

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



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Mr. LEAHY. I ask unanimous consent to be able to continue as in morning business for about 3 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WELCOMING THE DALAI LAMA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I feel honored to be a Member of the Senate and to be President pro tempore. But I cannot think of any greater honor than this morning, when I was able to introduce to the Senate an old and dear friend, His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Marcelle and I have been friends of His Holiness for decades. We count that as a great treasure, as does Senator FEINSTEIN, whom I saw earlier on the floor, another long-time friend of His Holiness, along with her husband.

I have watched him for so many years in his representation of the Tibetan people. He is joined on the floor by another Buddhist, Senator HIRONO of Hawaii. The gracious comments of Senator REID reflect how people feel about him. I think of the faith of his people and how they are moved. I told his Holiness of this story when I walked through the streets of Lhasa, Tibet, years ago, and a man holding a small child saw me and pointed to my camera and held up a picture of His Holiness.

He was risking being imprisoned for having that. But he insisted I take his picture. I did. I have given that photograph to His Holiness. I told him the story, that when we asked the man why he risked prison to show the picture of His Holiness, he said: Because people have to know. The world has to know the great faith of the Tibetan people longing for the autonomy they deserve to practice their faith.

Fortunately, they have as a symbol of that faith the Dalai Lama, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, a man who touches everybody's conscience. He touches this Catholic every time I see him. It goes beyond whatever faith you are. He is a gift to the world. I am so honored to have been able to introduce him here today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. REID. Mr. President, with His Holiness here in the Senate Chamber, there are a number of Senators who would like to say hello to him. So based on that, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 9:44 a.m., recessed until 9:46 a.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.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 Republicans controlling the first half.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREE- MENT—EXECUTIVE NOMINA- TIONS

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that following action on S. 1917, the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Nos. 504, 513, 640, and 547; that the Senate proceed to vote on confirmation of the nominations in the order listed; that there be 2 minutes for debate prior to each vote, equally divided in the usual form, and that the votes be 10 minutes in length; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

FLOOD INSURANCE AND VETERANS MEDICAL CLINICS

Mr. VITTER. I rise to talk about two very important issues for the country and for Louisiana. The first is fixing the national flood insurance system, getting it right. The good news is I think we are well on a path to doing that effectively. The second is veterans medical clinics, two of which are in Louisiana. They have been held up for completely bureaucratic reasons and aren't moving forward as they need to serve the veterans in Lafayette and Lake Charles, LA, and in about 25 other locations around the country.

First, flood insurance. Only a couple of days ago the House passed by a huge margin, over 300 votes, a strong bill to permanently fix the National Flood Insurance Program. Those aspects of the so-called Biggert-Waters act passed over 1 year ago but are unworkable, clearly creating problems on the ground.

This is great news, because unless we fix those very real problems, we would have major problems on our hands in the National Flood Insurance Program,

not only in Louisiana, not only in Florida, and not only in the Superstorm Sandy area, but in every State in the country—every State. It is not a question of if these issues are coming to your State, it is a question of when and exactly to what extent.

Over 1 year ago, we passed the Biggert-Waters act. That was an important reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program. It also included reforms, and many of those reforms needed to happen to stabilize the financing of the program.

What no one understood adequately then, however, is that those well-intended reforms, in practice, in implementation by FEMA, would lead to unsustainable, completely unaffordable rate increases in a significant number of cases.

That only began to be understood in the months after the bill was passed as FEMA started to implement it, as FEMA came to homeowners, came to State authorities, came to Members of Congress, and began to lay out some of the rates we would see in certain areas.

I am not talking about modest rate increases. We need modest rate increases to stabilize the financing of the program. I am talking about completely unaffordable rate increases in some cases—flood insurance rates going from \$300 a year to \$11,000 a year or \$19,000 a year or \$26,000 a year on a modest middle-class home and on a middle-class family that followed the rules every step of the way. We can't allow that to stand.

First, it is fundamentally unfair. As I said, these middle-class families followed the rules every step of the way. They built to the right elevation when they built their homes, never let their premiums lapse, and never let their insurance lapse.

In that context, for them to be hit with truly unaffordable rate increases—increases that could literally cause them to have to walk away from their home in some significant number of cases and not be able to afford to stay there—is just plain wrong.

Secondly, it is completely counterproductive, because one of the ways we have stabilized the National Flood Insurance Program fiscally is to grow the program, to have more folks paying premiums, and to have more folks covered, not fewer. This aspect of Biggert-Waters, which would lead to truly unaffordable rate increases in a significant number of cases, is unworkable from the very vantage point of the goal of Biggert-Waters to stabilize the system. So we can't let that stand for that reason either.

The good news is, because of those very real problems, both the Senate, and now the House, have come together in a major bipartisan way to fix the issue. The Senate acted about 1 month ago passing meaningful legislation. I was an original coauthor and a strong supporter. As I said a few minutes ago, the House acted two nights ago—Mardi Gras night in Louisiana terms—to take strong action to fix this program.