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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, April 1, 2014, at 12 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, MARCH 31, 2014

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, a Senator from the State of Connecticut.

PRAYER

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

Eternal God, You have withheld nothing we need. Today, continue to meet the needs of our lawmakers. Give them so much more than they expect or merit that they will sing praises for Your goodness. In these days of challenges and opportunities, empower them with faith, courage, and goodwill to make the world a better place. Lord, use them as Your servants to bring healing to our Nation and world. Today, we also pray for the ill, the bereaved, the infirm, the discouraged, the lonely and the homeless.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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 31, 2014.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, a Senator from the State of Connecticut, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MURPHY 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 my remarks and those of the Republican leader, we will proceed to H.R. 4302, Protecting Access to Medicare Act of 2014, with the time until 5 p.m. equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

At 5 p.m. the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the nomination of John Owens to be U.S. circuit judge for the Ninth Circuit, posteloture.

At 5:30 p.m. there could be up to four rollcall votes: First, on confirmation of the Owens nomination; then, if a Budget Act point of order is raised on the SGR bill, there will be a vote on the motion to waive the point of order; then passage of the SGR bill; and finally, on the motion to proceed to H.R.

3979, the legislative vehicle for the unemployment insurance bill.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I wish a happy baseball opening day to everyone. Actually, it started last night, not today, but it sounds better to do it during the daytime.

Although it is opening day for Major League Baseball, it also happens to be the last day for Americans to sign up for ObamaCare, the Affordable Care Act.

To date there are over 10 million newly-insured Americans benefiting from the health care law now in effect, and there are millions more who have changed their insurance because of this legislation. So it is clear Americans are signing up for this quality health care in record numbers—and that is an understatement.

I also am very happy we have been able to come to an agreement on the Medicare physician payment system. It is a 12-month fix. We need to take action on this to ensure that Medicare patients will be able to see their doctors. But the fact remains this legislation is not perfect. It is not ideal. I wish we could have followed the chairman of the Finance Committee, Senator WYDEN, who came in kind of late. Most of the work was done by Ambassador Baucus before he came in. But he worked really hard, and he wants to pay for it in a way I think is appropriate—to use the unspent money we have from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, called OCO, the Overseas Contingency Operations fund. But at this

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



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stage it doesn't appear it is now going to happen.

This legislation wasn't some last-minute deal. Senator Baucus worked on this for months, and it is the basis for what we are going to do here today. There were tough negotiations. Unfortunately, the parties could not come to an agreement on what a permanent fix should be. I said that I believe a permanent fix should be what Chairman WYDEN suggested and continues to suggest.

But House Republicans, though, chose to pass a partisan bill and increase the number of uninsured Americans and raised the cost of premiums. I believe we should repeal the defective payment system without increasing costs and without limiting access to quality health care. We need to restore sanity to the Medicare payment system without cutting benefits to seniors and without shifting the financial burden to hospital and other providers. We have done enough of that already. But right now we don't have the votes to do what would be the better thing to do.

So for millions of elderly Americans and their doctors, this fix is good news. It means the promise of accessible, quality health care to our Nation's seniors is being honored again—this time for another year. So while I am pleased with this temporary patch, I hope it is our last patch.

In the meantime, I extend my appreciation to Senator WYDEN, the chairman of the Finance Committee, for his work to bring stability to the Medicare payment system. From the moment he assumed the gavel to become chairman of that committee, he hit the ground running on this issue, as well as reforming the entire Tax Code. As we speak he is also doing some good work on the so-called tax extenders. It is my understanding he is meeting with his committee members today.

UNEMPLOYMENT EXTENSION

After confirming this long-awaited judge for the Ninth Circuit and approving a patch for the Medicare payment program, the Senate will turn to a long overdue extension of benefits for the long-term unemployed. This is a matter of really significant importance to millions of Americans. We have waited 3 months since Republicans first filibustered a bill to restore emergency benefits. More importantly, unemployed Americans have waited even longer. Since that filibuster, nearly 1 million more Americans have lost their benefits. That is 300,000 people a month who have been thrust into poverty not knowing how they will pay their bills.

I received a letter recently from a Nevadan named Jane who pleaded for Congress to extend benefits for the long-term unemployed. She is what we would call an older American, an older Nevadan. She didn't make the plea for herself. It was for her son. She said:

Please do all in your power to get this matter resolved. . . . My son has been looking since May of last year. He held his last job for 26 years and doesn't have a lot of ex-

perience in other fields. I cannot continue to help him. I lost my husband last July and lost his Social Security. I only have mine now. Please do what you can to help those who are in this position.

So imagine an elderly woman, a widow, so desperate to assist her middle-aged son that she is using her meager Social Security check to help him get by. Now her own financial situation is in jeopardy.

Jane and her son have already seen what happens when much-needed unemployment benefits don't get extended. For Nevadans struggling to pay their rent, to keep the lights on or to feed the kids, they have waited long enough. But we know why Republicans prefer to wait. For many of my colleagues across the aisle, waiting means doing nothing. So the fact is the majority of Republicans here in Congress are simply opposed to helping the long-term unemployed. Most won't say so, but that is the truth.

One GOP Congressman from California even said that an extension of unemployment benefits "will encourage unemployment." That is a tough one to follow. This elected Congressman believes that the half million people in the State of California who had their unemployment benefits terminated actually prefer to be jobless. I don't think so.

Here in the Senate last Thursday only 10 out of 45 Republicans voted to help Democrats break the 3-month filibuster. In fact, the GOP Senators from the State with the third-highest population of eligible long-term unemployed—Texas—both voted to block an extension of benefits. It is as if they simply don't care that some of their own constituents are teetering on the verge of indigence.

Notwithstanding this opposition to extending unemployment benefits, I am confident we will pass this bipartisan legislation in the Senate this week here. Then, hopefully, the Republicans in the House will have soft hearts and strong minds and allow this to pass over there. It is in their hands.

We hope they will be considerate to the roughly 2.8 million long-term unemployed across the country. Perhaps then these struggling Americans will finally get the relief they deserve.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

PROTECTING ACCESS TO MEDICARE ACT OF 2014

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to consideration of H.R. 4302, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 4302) to amend the Social Security Act to extend Medicare payments to physicians and other provisions of the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and for other purposes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order the time until 5 p.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. 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.

Mr. REID. I would now suggest the absence of a quorum and have the time divided equally between both sides.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. 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.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, America's top priority is the same today as it was last year, the year before that, and the year before that: unemployment, jobs, and how to get this economy growing again.

Of course, these are concerns which transcend any kind of partisan affiliation. They transcend geographic and demographic boundaries. They are shared, of course, by Republicans, Democrats, Independents—everyone—people from all parts of our country.

But the sad fact is it has been almost 5 years since America's official economic recovery began and still too many people who want to work can't find a job. There are still 3.8 million people who have been unemployed for more than 6 months, and the labor force participation rate remains stuck at 63 percent. Of course, those are the people who don't even show up on the unemployment statistics because they have given up looking for work. This is what we talk about when we are talking about the labor participation rate—the lowest number since 30 years ago.

Since the current President took office, the average amount of time the unemployed have been without a job has almost doubled, from less than 20 weeks to more than 37 weeks. This is a shocking statistic.

So since President Obama has been in office, the average time people have been unemployed—have been out of work—went from less than 20 weeks to now 37 weeks, and the number of people on food stamps has increased from 32.2 million to nearly 46.8 million people.

As for median household income, it is now more than \$2,400 lower than it was at the end of the recession in June of 2009. The President talks a lot about