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Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ANGUS S. KING, Jr., a Senator from the State of Maine.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

God of our salvation, whose ear is always open to hear the cries of contrite hearts, consecrate our lawmakers today for Your service. Give them tallness of stature to see above the wall of prideful opinions the greatest good for the most people. Lord, provide them with the courage, vision, and wisdom to face these crucial days confident in the ultimate triumph of Your providence. Make their lives as lighted windows of faith, hope, and love amid the encircling gloom. Be the unseen guests at every meeting and guide each of their decisions.

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, February 3, 2014.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable ANGUS S. KING, Jr., a

Senator from the State of Maine, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. KING thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HEALTH AND BENEFITS AND MILITARY RETIREMENT PAY RESTORATION ACT OF 2014—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to Calendar No. 297, the veterans omnibus bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows: Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 297, S. 1950, a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, we will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany the farm bill, H.R. 2642. The time until 5:30 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees. At 5:30 p.m. there will be a cloture vote on the farm bill conference report.

As we have already announced, final passage will be tomorrow after our weekly caucuses.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1977

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am told that S. 1977 is due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1977) to repeal Section 403 of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 relating to an

annual adjustment of retired pay for members of the Armed Forces under the age of 62, and to provide an offset.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I object to any further proceedings with this legislation at this time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard. The bill will be placed on the calendar.

THE FARM BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, tonight the Senate will vote to end debate on the farm bill conference report. I expect the Senate to conclude work on this measure, which will reduce the deficit and protect hungry families. This will happen, as I indicated, tomorrow afternoon.

Passing this legislation will support our Nation's farmers and ranchers and more than 16 million jobs in the farm industry. Ensuring that our farms remain the most productive in the world and protecting American agricultural jobs is vital for our economic recovery. I have been in the Senate and the House for a while, as has the chairman of the agriculture committee, the junior Senator from Michigan, so I have seen people handle legislation. The work done by Senator STABENOW has been remarkably good. It is exemplary for her to work to the point where we are now going to pass this important legislation. I look forward, as she does, to a strong bipartisan vote on cloture tonight and on the passage of the bill tomorrow.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

As we continue to work toward final passage of the farm bill, a bipartisan group of Senators has been working behind the scenes to reach an agreement to restore emergency unemployment benefits to 1.6 million people. In the 3 weeks since the Republicans filibustered a bill to extend this important program, 220,000 more Americans lost their benefits. State economies across the country have suffered as unemployed people, who are already getting by on so little, had to find ways to survive on even less.

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



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S665

When unemployment benefits dry up, customers disappear from local stores and businesses suffer. More than \$2.2 billion has been drained from State economies since the emergency unemployment insurance expired.

Nevada alone lost \$29 million in economic activity just last month, and \$28 million has drained from the economy in the Republican leader's home State of Kentucky since the emergency benefits expired on December 31. It is no wonder two-thirds of Americans—including 65 percent of Independents—believe we should extend unemployment assistance. Helping neighbors who have been hit hard is not only the compassionate thing to do, it is also the smart thing to do for our economy.

Economists say there is no way to stimulate the economy more than to give these people who don't have jobs some money because they are going to spend it.

Since Republicans filibustered a bill to restore benefits without adding a penny to the deficit—that legislation would not have added a penny to the deficit—the toll on local and national economies has been devastating, but the toll on unemployed Americans has been immeasurable.

For people who worked all of their lives and lost their job through no fault of their own, being unemployed is difficult enough, but worrying about how to pay the rent, put gas in the car, and buy groceries while they look for a new job can be demoralizing. For the long-term unemployed, some of those who have been struggling to find work for more than a year, \$300 a week in unemployment benefits can be the difference between keeping a roof over their heads or becoming homeless, and this is no hyperbole.

A 57-year-old Nevada woman wrote to me last week to say that the loss of her unemployment check was the last straw. Now she is homeless and couch surfing. She is sleeping on the couches of friends kind enough to take her in.

This is what she wrote:

Can you imagine sleeping on friends' couches at my age? Can you imagine having to sell everything you worked hard for just to keep gas in the car in the event someone calls for an interview?

She went on to say:

I have worked my whole life, since I was 16 years old, and contributed to a system that is now failing me on a major scale.

Millions of people—such as this unfortunate Nevada woman—who have worked hard all of their lives and contributed to their communities and played by the rules are on the verge of losing everything, just like her. It doesn't have to be this way.

I remain cautiously optimistic that Republicans will heed their constituents back home and help Democrats restore emergency benefits to Americans in need.

Congress can't solve every problem, but we can solve this problem. All we have to do is work together—Democrats and Republicans—to do what is

right for our constituents, our country, and our economy.

I urge Republicans to join us to restore these crucial benefits.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Will the chair announce the business of the day.

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

AGRICULTURAL ACT OF 2014— CONFERENCE REPORT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 2642, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the House to the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 2642), to provide for the reform and continuation of agricultural and other programs of the Department of Agriculture through fiscal year 2018, and for other purposes, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its amendment to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of all conferees on the part of both Houses.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 5:30 p.m. will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, as we begin the final debate and vote on the farm bill conference report, I thank our majority leader for supporting this effort every step of the way. Every time I have gone to him and said, Mr. Leader, we need to have time for some particular procedural vote or to move it along, he has been there. So I thank him very much for moving this conference report so quickly.

I also thank Senator COCHRAN and our entire committee. When Senator COCHRAN is here later today, I will speak more about the wonderful partnership we have had. The senior Senator from North Dakota will be speaking after me. I thank, Senator HOEVEN for being an invaluable partner through this entire process. It has been a tremendous pleasure working with the senior Senator, and he has made a real impact. I am very appreciative.

As my colleagues know, the last farm bill expired 490 days ago. It is time to get it done. It is time to pass this tomorrow and to give it to the President for his signature.

This is not your father's farm bill. This farm bill is focused on the future, not the past. We worked long and hard to make sure that policies worked for every region of the country, for all of the different kinds of agricultural production we do in our country—from

traditional row crops, to specialty crops like fruits and vegetables, to livestock, to organics, to local food systems.

For the past 2½ years, we have been working in a bipartisan way with colleagues in the Senate and in the House, and I appreciate our partnership with the chairman and ranking member in the House to craft a farm bill that reflects the future in American agriculture and the healthy food choices that consumers are asking for in the marketplace.

As we begin this final debate, I want to focus for a few minutes on some of what people might not be focused on in this bill. Later today I am going to speak about the bill and each of its parts.

There are just five things I wanted to highlight as we begin this debate.

First, conservation. The farm bill is actually our country's largest investment in land and water conservation on private lands, which are the majority of our American lands. That means we are restoring and preserving wildlife habitat and open spaces. We help farmers reduce runoff to help keep rivers and streams clean and teeming with fish. This bill includes a historic new agreement that ties conservation compliance to crop insurance.

This bill helps prevent plowing of native grasses through a provision called Sod Saver that will save taxpayers money and preserve sensitive habitat for years to come.

Second, energy jobs. This farm bill has major investments in American energy independence. I am very proud to say this conference report contains the full \$880 million investment we passed in the Senate for renewable and clean energy. It includes my Grow it Here, Make it Here initiative to support innovative biobase manufacturing that takes crops grown on our farms, uses it to replace petroleum and other chemicals, and transforms them into consumer products.

It contains the Rural Energy for America Program, known as REAP, to help farmers install on-farm renewable energy and energy efficiency systems to lower their energy usage. This bill supports the development of the next generation of biofuels, including new technologies using food and agricultural waste.

Third, healthy foods. One of the incentivized programs in this bill, among others, is a successful program in Michigan called Double Up Food Bucks, which essentially doubles food assistance when a family is shopping for produce at a farmers' market. Speaking of which, we have quadrupled support for farmers' markets—four times more help than the previous farm bill. That means farmers have more choices to find fresh, locally grown foods, and it means farmers have more opportunities to sell those products and grow our rural economies.

Fourth, research. Crops and livestock are affected by pests and diseases, and