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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, February 14, 2014, at 2 p.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2014

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable EDWARD J. MARKEY, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, to whom we must give an account for all our powers and privileges, guide the Members of this body so that they will be faithful stewards of Your will. Open their minds and hearts to know and do Your bidding. Teach them to rely on Your strength and to serve You with honor. Lord, help them to discover in their daily work the joy of a partnership with You. As they learn to find delight in Your presence, plant within the soil of their hearts a desire to glorify You. May they rest and wait patiently for You, the author and finisher of their faith, embracing Your precepts and walking in Your path.

We pray in Your great 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 assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 12, 2014.

To the Senate:

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

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MARKEY 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 be in a period of morning business until 11 o'clock this morning. Republicans will control the first half and Democrats the final half.

At 11 a.m. this morning the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider Executive Calendar Nos. 525, 595, 527, and 529. These are all extremely important nominations. At 11:30 this morning there will be up to four rollcall votes on the confirmation of these nominations.

We also hope to consider the debt limit legislation, military retirement

pay, and, hopefully, additional nominations today.

RESTORING EARNED PENSIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as I just mentioned, today we hope we can act on two vital pieces of legislation. On this side of the aisle, as we say, we are ready to move. We want to move to a measure to restore earned retirement pay to our Nation's heroes—retirees of the U.S. armed services. Dozens of major veterans organizations have written us in support of this legislation which was passed by the House of Representatives yesterday.

I commend the sponsors of the Senate bill to restore veterans' pensions—Senators PRYOR, SHAHEEN, HAGAN, and BEGICH, among others—forcing Republicans in the House and the Senate to take this issue very seriously and take it seriously now. Without their leadership we would never have reached a compromise that protects our Nation's heroic veterans and reached it so quickly. The Senate's unanimous vote on Monday to move forward with the bill to restore veterans' pensions forced the House to understand that we are serious about this and secured a resolution that protects veterans.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is encouraging that some of my Republican colleagues seem to be regaining their grip on sanity this week. Republicans have shown a willingness to compromise to restore veterans' hard-

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



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earned pensions. A few reasonable Republicans were willing to join Democrats to avert a catastrophic default on our Nation's obligations—a default that would have thrown our economy into a tailspin and damaged this Nation's standing in the world.

I commend Speaker BOEHNER for doing the right thing. He voted for this, and he had enough Republican votes to get it done. I have said often that he has a difficult job—if not the most difficult, certainly one of the most difficult jobs in Washington, especially when we look at the caucus he has to deal with. I am pleased he has come to the realization that the full faith and credit of this country is not a hostage to be held for political gain.

Unfortunately, Republicans on this side of the Capitol are forcing us to jump through procedural hoops to alleviate the threat of a default. I can't imagine that they are doing that, but they are.

Every reputable economist acknowledges that defaulting on our bills would devastate the economy and waste the past 5 years of recovery. The recovery is good, but it is not great. We can do a lot better.

According to a report by the non-partisan Peterson Institute, when Republicans forced us to the brink of default 2 years ago, it cost our economy \$150 billion in productivity and 750,000 jobs. This is not some leftwing blog that is saying this; this is a non-partisan institute that is well respected—it will cost our economy \$150 billion in productivity and 750,000 jobs. Scary.

The reason I am a little concerned is because it was just a few months ago that Republicans in the House, by a two-thirds majority, voted to keep the government closed after having been closed for 16 days and voted to default on our Nation's debt. So I hope the Senate is not going to follow that tea party-driven action that was done in the House just a short time ago.

Financial industry leaders have warned Congress again and again that even the threat of default ripples through the economy, and today there is the threat of a default. We have Republican Senators saying they are going to filibuster the debt ceiling. We can't default on our obligations. It is too bad that a few Senate Republicans would threaten a filibuster on this critical legislation. It is critical, and it is crucial. However, I am hopeful Senate Republicans won't force the economy to wait for weeks or even days for a resolution. We should wrap this up today.

So I hope we can vote and vote soon. The markets all over the world are watching to see what we do in the Senate. The House did the right thing. I believe many of my Republican colleagues would like to be reasonable—I really do believe that—if they weren't so beholden and afraid of the tea party overlords. I am hopeful that a more bipartisan, commonsense approach—one

that favors collaboration over hostage taking—will prevail this year.

Congress should be striding from accomplishment to accomplishment, not staggering from crisis to crisis as they force us to do. If we spent more time working together and less time running out the clock on procedural hurdles and Republican filibusters, we might actually get legislation done in the Senate.

So I hope we can continue to cooperate and collaborate this year and to deliver results for Americans looking for action instead of the constant gridlock we have had.

Mr. President, I note the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCAIN. 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.

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 11 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.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate in morning business, and pending the arrival of the Republican leader, I will pause and then ask unanimous consent to return to my statement at that time.

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

MASS ATROCITIES IN SYRIA

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I rise to appeal to the conscience of my colleagues and my fellow citizens about the mass atrocities that the Assad regime is perpetrating in Syria. When the images and horrors of this conflict occasionally show up on our television screens, the impulse of many Americans is to change the channel. But we must not look away. We must not divert our eyes from the suffering of the Syrian people, for if we do, we ignore, we sacrifice that which is most precious in ourselves—our ability to empathize with the suffering of others, to share it, to acknowledge through our own sense of revulsion that what is

happening in Syria is a stain on the collective conscience of moral peoples everywhere.

I appeal to my colleagues not to look away from the images I will show. I want to warn all who are watching these are graphic and disturbing pictures, but they are the real face of war and human suffering in Syria today—a war our Nation has the power to help end but which we are failing to do.

These images are drawn from a cache of more than 55,000 photographs that were taken between March 2011 and August 2013 by a Syrian military policeman, whose job it was to document the horrors the Assad regime committed against political prisoners in its jails. This individual eventually defected to the opposition along with his photographs, which were meticulously reviewed and verified by three renowned international war crimes prosecutors and a team of independent forensic experts. They compiled their findings in a report late last month that provides direct evidence that the Assad regime was responsible for the systematic abuse, torture, starvation, and killing of approximately 11,000 detainees in what amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity. These are just a few of those pictures and far from the most disturbing.

I urge every Member of Congress and the American people to read the full report, which can be found on both cnn.com and theguardian.com. Although only a handful of these gruesome images have been released publicly, the authors have provided their own startling commentary on what they reveal.

David Crane, the first chief prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the man responsible for indicting former Liberian President Charles Taylor for crimes against humanity, stated that many of the photographs show groupings of bodies in ways that “looked like a slaughterhouse.” Crane characterized the Syrian Government as a “callous, industrial machine grinding its citizens” that is guilty of “industrial-age mass killing.”

Professor Sir Geoffrey Nice, lead prosecutor in the case against former Yugoslav President Milosevic at The Hague, reported that the systematic way the bodies were cataloged and the effort given to obscure the true causes of death leads one to “reasonably infer that this is a pattern of behavior” for Assad's forces.

But perhaps most chilling of all, Sir Desmond de Silva, who also served as a chief prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, stated that the emaciated bodies revealed in these pictures are “reminiscent of the pictures of those who were found still alive in the Nazi death camps after World War II.”

Yesterday, in a hearing of the Committee on Armed Services, I asked the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, whether these photographs, which clearly depict ghastly