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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, February 17, 2023, at 10 a.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2023

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable PETER WELCH, a Senator from the State of Vermont.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, source of knowledge and wisdom, give us Your truth. Open our eyes to see Your truth. Strengthen our hearts to face Your truth. Illuminate our spirits to understand Your truth. Fortify our minds that we will remember Your truth.

Give Your Senators today the determination to obey Your truth. Show them what to believe and what to do.

Lord, help us all to listen carefully to Your wise counsel and store up knowledge that transforms lives.

We pray in Your Holy 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 (Mrs. MURRAY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 15, 2023.

To the Senate:

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

PATTY MURRAY,
President pro tempore.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

TRIBUTE TO DIANNE FEINSTEIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday, our wonderful colleague from California, Senator DIANNE FEINSTEIN, announced that she will retire at the end of her term.

I am careful not to throw the word “legend” around too often in this Chamber, as it truly befits so few, but DIANNE FEINSTEIN is precisely that. She is a legend.

She is a legend in California, where she shattered innumerable glass ceilings as the first woman Senator from the State. And we forget how, even 20,

30 years ago, the barriers which are still in front of women were even stronger, so it took a strong, tough, resolute woman to break them, and she did.

She is a legend here in the Senate. The longest serving woman Senator in U.S. history, she built a reputation as an expert legislator and a leader on so many issues—gun violence, the environment, women’s rights, and so much more.

I first got to know DIANNE when she led the effort to pass the 1994 ban on assault weapons in the Senate. I led it in the House. I have always been amazed by the sheer depth of her knowledge on the issues and how careful she is about learning all of the facts before she goes forward and then her seemingly innate ability to convince people on both sides of the aisle to work together. That is why her list of accomplishments is so long—the assault weapons ban, protecting oversight authority during the investigation into U.S. torture, championing the Violence Against Women Act. The list goes on and on and on.

But perhaps her greatest legacy is how she blazed a trail for women and girls everywhere. Today, there are 25 women serving in this Chamber. There are 25 women serving in this Chamber, all of whom stand on DIANNE’s shoulders.

We are all very glad we have another year and a half with her to fight the good fight, and I know she will use that time to fiercely advocate for women’s rights in all aspects of life and unwaveringly represent the people of California.

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



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DEMOCRATIC AGENDA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on implementation, as President Biden pointed out last week during his State of the Union Address, the Democratic agenda is already bearing fruit across this country. There will be tens of thousands of projects funded. Last week, for instance, I joined with President Biden to talk about Gateway in New York, which is something New Yorkers have waited for for decades and is vital to continuing the health of our bistate—New York-New Jersey—economy as well as the economy of the Northeast.

When the President came and we actually started working on the project, you could feel exaltation and excitement in the city. That is going to start happening again and again everywhere—in urban, suburban, and rural areas—as Democrats make it a priority to get the word out about all the good things that are coming the American people's way. It is one thing for Americans to read about things that Congress has passed, but when they can actually feel and see these accomplishments play out in their communities, it makes a world of difference. We have a responsibility to make the connection between what happens in this Chamber and what is going on in people's backyards.

This morning, I sent out a Dear Colleague with Senator STABENOW about how Democrats are going to get the word out on implementing our agenda in the coming weeks. We have a great story to tell the American people and no shortage of examples of how our agenda is making the country stronger and making Americans' lives better.

Let me give a few examples: Seniors on Medicare, for instance, can now, already, take advantage of Democrats' historic \$35-a-month cap on insulin. After years of hard work, this is no longer an aspiration; a \$35 insulin cap is now the law of the land. Seniors, who were up nights worrying how they were going to pay \$400, \$500, \$600, \$700 a month for this vital drug when you have diabetes can now breathe easy. Millions of people—the seniors and their families and friends—can breathe easier because of what we have done.

Now—let's not forget—we should be expanding the cap to all Americans, not just to those over 65. And in this Congress, Democrats are going to work hard, try to work with our Republican colleagues—we hope they will join us—to make that happen.

Here is another one: Very few people know of this, but we are spreading the word. Seniors on Medicaid can take advantage of free shingles vaccines. These two benefits alone—the insulin cap and free shingles vaccines—could mean hundreds in savings every year for seniors on Medicaid. And so many seniors are.

On the infrastructure fund: Communities across the country can now apply for new grant funding to fix their roads, their bridges, their highways.

These are perhaps the most obvious examples of our agenda at work. People are going to start seeing more orange vests, more hardhats, and good-paying union jobs in their communities as the communities get the updates they sorely need.

And the Inflation Reduction Act is already doing exactly what its name suggests: saving people money. The tax credits alone can give families as much as \$14,000 for making their homes energy efficient. People can put in heat pumps, get help to get those heat pumps, and their heating bills go down. It is a great thing.

The examples go on. Democrats are going to make implementation a top priority in this Congress. After everything we have been through over the past 3 years, Americans deserve to hear some good news about how their leaders are working hard for them. That is precisely what we will focus on in the coming years.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, chaos over there in the House on the Republican side. Each day that passes in Washington, two things hold true: We keep getting closer to default but no closer to a Republican plan to lift the debt ceiling. I repeat once again: House Republicans, Speaker MCCARTHY, show us your plan. It has been more than a month since Speaker MCCARTHY and House Republicans began threatening the entire U.S. economy in order to secure drastic spending cuts that, in all likelihood, will hurt the American people badly. But in all this time, nobody can seem to get an answer to the \$64,000 question: What cuts exactly are the Republicans proposing? Show us your plan.

Some of the things we are hearing from the MAGA wing is the stuff of nightmares. Later this afternoon, I will join with a number of Senate colleagues to shine a light on how devastating the radical MAGA cuts would be for American families if the MAGA Republicans got their way.

But where is the House Republican plan? How are they going to lift the debt ceiling? After months of no answers, now Speaker MCCARTHY has recently claimed Republican leadership is trying to come up with a plan right now. I am glad he is at least saying he wants to answer our question.

Frankly, it is a lot easier said than done, and I don't think Speaker MCCARTHY will be able to unify his conference. It takes 218 votes, as we know, to pass anything in the House, and with the razor-thin GOP majority paralyzed by internal division and with the stronghold the MAGA Republicans have on the Speaker, Speaker MCCARTHY will have a very difficult time getting everyone on the same page, if he can do it at all.

To quote from Punchbowl this morning, "House Republicans . . . face an intractable political math challenge as

they seek to reduce the \$1.4 trillion deficit." For one, Speaker MCCARTHY has insisted Republicans will only preserve the full faith and credit of the United States if they secure drastic spending cuts first.

MAGA Republican hardliners have demanded Speaker MCCARTHY release a proposal to balance the budget over the next 10 years, one of the conditions for having supported his leadership. At the same time, Speaker MCCARTHY has also claimed Republicans won't touch Social Security and Medicare. Now, I will believe that when I see it because so many Republicans, not just a handful—so many—have spent years going on record calling for cuts and changes and privatization of these programs.

All this leads to a terrible conclusion. If Speaker MCCARTHY is going to meet these goals, Republicans would need to cut 85 percent of all discretionary spending in order to balance the budget in 10 years. Let me say that again. If Speaker MCCARTHY and House Republicans are serious about balancing the budget in their 10-year plan without touching Medicare and Social Security, they will need to cut 85 percent of all discretionary spending. That would be Republican austerity at an apocalyptic level.

Teachers, nurses, firefighters, student loan borrowers, police officers would all kiss Federal funding goodbye. Funding for scientific research, so vital in our competition with China, would likely disappear. Child hunger would spike without Federal nutrition programs. Housing programs would be starved of resources. We would be thrust into a greater housing crisis than we now have.

So my point is this: Speaker MCCARTHY is not going to be able to keep his promise to balance the budget in 10 years while, at the same time, leaving Social Security and Medicare untouched. The math doesn't add up. Very soon, the MAGA brigade will see that the Speaker made a bunch of promises that he won't be able to keep, and I worry greatly that the dangers of slipping into default will only increase as the toxic dynamic within the House GOP gets worse day by day.

That is why it is so important that now, early on, the House Republicans show us their plan.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, on ESG and China—two more items, Mr. President. First, reports are out that Republicans will reintroduce a measure targeting a new rule from the Department of Labor that allows—repeat, allows but not requires—fiduciaries to consider the impacts of climate change and other ESG issues when making investment decisions.

Across the country, hard-right State legislatures are up in arms and trying to stop State investment funds from working with money managers who dare commit the, oh-so heinous offense