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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

God, our Father, thank You for eyes to see and hearts to feel the wonders of Your world. Fill our Senators today with fresh faith in Your power to protect and sustain our Nation and world. May they face challenges with the triumphant confidence that no weapon that has been formed can prevail against Your eternal purpose. Lord, keep them calm in temper, clear in mind, sound in heart, and strong in faith. Enable them to perform faithfully and well what You require, even to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You. When this day's work is done, give them refreshment of mind, spirit, and body.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable TOM UDALL 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. BYRD).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, July 29, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable TOM UDALL, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. UDALL of New Mexico 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, this morning, following the remarks of the two leaders, the Senate will resume consideration of the Energy and Water appropriations bill. Cloture motions were filed last night. As a result, there is a 1 p.m. filing deadline for first-degree amendments. Rollcall votes are possible throughout the day. I would hope that people who want to offer amendments will do so, so we can complete this legislation. There is no reason we should not finish it today.

As I announced last night, I am going to turn to the Agriculture appropriations bill as soon as we complete the action on the bill that is now on the floor of the Senate.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HEALTH CARE WEEK VIII, DAY III

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, throughout the debate on health care reform, the administration has made a point of asking various stakeholders to come together and do their part: Doctors and hospitals are being asked to

find significant savings, seniors are being asked to make major sacrifices, and so are the States. Every week, it seems, the White House hosts an event aimed at showcasing some sacrifice being made by one group or another—every group, that is, except personal injury lawyers.

It is a glaring omission, since everyone knows that the constant threat of lawsuits is one of the reasons health care premiums for families have skyrocketed more than 100 percent over the past decade and the primary reason many doctors today spend a literal fortune on malpractice insurance even before they open their doors for business. To take just one example, neurosurgeons in Miami can expect to spend more on malpractice insurance every single year than many families in Miami can expect to spend on a new home.

This is a very serious problem, and everyone knows it. Yet we do not hear a word about it—not a word—from any of the Democratic-led committees in Congress that are working on reform. It is not because the administration has not raised the issue. Last month, the President himself acknowledged the widespread use of so-called defensive medicine or the practice of prescribing drugs or tests that are not really needed just to protect oneself from the threat of a lawsuit. During the same speech, the President said we need to explore a whole range of ideas about how to scale back defensive medicine. Well, Democrats in Congress must not have been paying much attention to that part of the speech because I have not heard a single word on this issue from any Democrat since—not one. One exception was the recent suggestion by some in the administration that doctors are performing unnecessary surgeries just to make an extra buck. I think a better explanation is the one the President gave last month when he said doctors often

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



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perform certain procedures just to protect themselves from frivolous lawsuits.

The costs associated with ever-increasing malpractice insurance and defensive medicine are indeed substantial, and both are simply, of course, passed along to consumers in the form of higher costs for even basic treatments and procedures. Many Americans pay an even higher price when doctors decide the threat of lawsuits and the cost of insurance just is not worth it and decide to close down their practices altogether. Every State feels the effect of out-of-control malpractice suits. One study suggests that Kentucky alone is 2,300 doctors short of the national average—a shortage that could be reduced, in part, by getting a handle on malpractice suits.

I have spoken before about the effects a culture of jackpot lawsuits has on everyday Americans, on people such as Rashelle Perryman of Crittenden County, KY. According to an article in the Louisville Courier Journal, Rashelle's first two babies were born at Crittenden County Hospital, which is about a 10-minute ride from her home. But her third child had to be delivered about 40 miles away. Why? Well, the rising malpractice rates had forced doctors at Crittenden County Hospital to stop delivering babies altogether. They just could not afford the malpractice insurance.

When the threat of lawsuits drives insurance premiums so high that many doctors are forced to go out of business, that mothers across the country cannot find a local obstetrician, and that health insurance costs for everyone continue to go up, we have a problem that needs to be addressed. Yet every single one of the so-called comprehensive health care reform proposals Democrats are currently putting together in Congress completely and totally ignores this issue.

The only people who benefit from the current system are the personal injury lawyers who can end up taking up to a third of every settlement and, frankly, if it is appealed, an even greater percentage, and protecting them is not what health care reform was supposed to be about. Yet it is hard to escape the conclusion that this is precisely what is going on here. If the administration wants to be comprehensive in its approach, it should ask the personal injury lawyers to make a sacrifice, just as they have asked America's seniors, doctors, Governors, and small business owners to make a sacrifice.

Americans do not want a government takeover of health care. They want reforms that everyone can understand and that all of us can agree on. And nothing could be simpler or more straightforward than putting an end to the junk lawsuits that drive up costs and put doctors out of business. Americans do not want grand schemes, they want commonsense proposals. Medical liability reform would be a very good place to start.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2010

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3183, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3183) making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2010, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Dorgan amendment No. 1813, in the nature of a substitute.

Reid amendment No. 1846 (to amendment No. 1813), to modify provisions relating to the Department of the Interior.

Alexander amendment No. 1862 (to amendment No. 1813), to limit disbursement of additional funds under the Troubled Asset Relief Program to certain automobile manufacturers, to impose fiduciary duties on the Secretary of the Treasury with respect to shareholders of such automobile manufacturers, to require the issuance of shares of common stock to eligible taxpayers which represent the common stock holdings of the United States Government in such automobile manufacturers.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

HEALTH CARE

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, we are waiting to proceed on the legislation that has come from the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water, which I chair. We are on the bill, but we are waiting for amendments and discussion.

But I want to make a point. We have had people coming to the floor of the Senate yesterday, now this morning, incessantly over a long period of time, talking about health care. Health care is, obviously, very important; no question about that. The relentless increase in the cost of health care hurts families. It hurts business. It hurts government programs that provide for health care. So we need to do something about that.

But it is interesting. What I hear on the floor of the Senate from the critics of these issues is: What is wrong? What is wrong? Well, it does not take a lot of energy or a lot of time to determine what is wrong and be a critic. I understand that.

I have often told the story of Mark Twain, who was asked to debate once, and he said: Of course I will be engaged in that debate, as long as I can take the negative side.

They said: Well, we have not even told you the subject of the debate.

He said: Oh, it doesn't matter. The negative side will take no preparation.

So it is with these discussions on the floor that I have just heard a moment

ago and heard all day yesterday as I sat here on the floor, talking about what is wrong. Well, do you know what, we know what is wrong. What is wrong is that we have this relentless rise of health care costs. We spend more on health care than anybody else in the world, by far, and we rank somewhere around 41st in life expectancy. We spend twice as much per person than almost everybody else in the world spends on health care.

I notice that all those critics who come out here talking about what is wrong with this plan or that plan never talk about prescription drugs because most of those who have been out here criticizing the various plans are people who vote against legislation to put downward pressure on prescription drugs. Yet one of the fastest rising areas of health care costs is prescription drugs.

Let me, if I might, ask unanimous consent to show on the floor of the Senate two bottles that would contain prescription drugs.

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

Mr. DORGAN. These two bottles I hold in my hand, which I have shown many times, contain Lipitor. It is medicine produced in Ireland and then shipped all around the world. This Lipitor, as you can see, comes from identical bottles. The same tablet, the same medicine, produced in the same plant by the same company, FDA-approved by our Food and Drug administration in our country, is put in two different bottles. One is shipped to the United States, this one, and the other is shipped to Canada. What is the difference? Well, there is no difference in the medicine. It came from the same place, produced by the same company. The difference is price. The Canadians get to pay half the price the Americans pay.

It is not just Lipitor, the most popular cholesterol-lowering drug that exists out there. It is not just Lipitor. It is prescription drug after prescription drug. The American people get to pay the highest prices in the world. You want to talk about how you cut health care costs? How about taking a whack at this and saying it is not fair that the American people should pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. Why are they required to pay the highest price in the world? Because there is kind of a sweetheart deal in law that says the only entity that can reimport prescription drugs is the drug manufacturer itself.

Much of the ingredients in these drugs come from all around the world—China, just as an example. The manufacturers can produce these drugs in Ireland, using ingredients from all around the world, and then bring them in to sell to the American consumer. But the American consumer cannot access the same FDA-approved drug sold in virtually every other industrial country at a fraction of the price the American consumer is charged.