

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there will be a period of morning business until 5 p.m. today. At 5 p.m., the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 3637.

What has happened—and the reason the Senator from Vermont is in the Chair—is airports in parts of the country are closed because of the fog, especially in Washington, DC. As a result, even people coming from the West weren't able to leave. The Sun might have been shining brightly there, but airplanes scheduled to come here couldn't be given a time to land. So we will have people who will not be here for our scheduled vote this evening, so we will reschedule that vote for tomorrow.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

I ask unanimous consent that the cloture vote on the motion to proceed to S. 3637 be postponed to occur at 2:15 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday, December 11; further, that if cloture is invoked on the motion to proceed, the motion to proceed be agreed to and the majority leader be recognized.

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

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 3664

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask for a second reading of S. 3664.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3664) to provide for debt limit extensions.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar under rule XIV.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last week the country received more good economic news. The private sector created 150,000 jobs—these are new jobs—and once again the unemployment rate fell. Unemployment is now at its lowest rate since December 2008. While too many families across the Nation are still struggling, especially in Nevada, there is no doubt our economy is headed in the right direction.

America is poised for a rebound this year if a few good things happen. The last thing we can afford is yet another crisis manufactured by Republicans in Congress just as the economy finally gains some momentum. If Republicans force a \$2,200 tax increase on 98 percent of American families and 97 percent of small businesses to protect the richest of the rich, the economy will suffer greatly.

If Republicans again threaten default on the full faith and credit of the

United States, the economy will suffer. We have seen the terrible impact of these contrived emergencies before. When Republicans threatened to shut down the government and force a default on the Nation's debt, the economy stumbled and middle-class families were in a state of peril. Who paid the price? Middle-class families.

Republicans face a real difficult choice in Congress. Will they cooperate with Democrats and put the country on a path to provide certainty for families and investors? As my friend the senior Senator from Missouri said, the Speaker has a chance to do some good things, but he also has a problem because he has to decide whether he is going to work to save his speakership or the country.

Will they cooperate with Democrats or will they force us to lurch from one crisis to the next in 2013 as they did in 2011 and 2012? We need long-term solutions, not temporary fixes to problems that dragged down the economic recovery over the past 2 years.

The House should take up the Senate-passed middle-class tax cut which provides lasting security for families and businesses making less than \$250,000 a year. The number of Republicans calling on the Speaker to allow a vote to give middle-class families confidence their taxes will not go up has grown. Speaker BOEHNER could end this suspense with just one vote.

Over the weekend, the junior Senator from Tennessee, Mr. CORKER, joined a number of Senate Republicans and more than one dozen House Republicans in calling for that vote. Senator CORKER, admitting Republicans have little leverage in this faceoff, said: "I actually am beginning to believe that is the best route for us to take."

Democrats agree sending the Senate-passed tax cut to President Obama's desk is the quickest and most sensible way out of this crisis. But avoiding the fiscal cliff is no excuse for Republicans to replace this artificial crisis with another one.

Congress should also pass Senator MCCONNELL's proposal to end periodic standoffs over the debt ceiling. His plan would give President Obama the authority to avoid default on the Nation's bills without a protracted fight. Senate Democrats are ready to vote on the minority leader's sensible suggestion at any time, but first Senator MCCONNELL needs to stop filibustering his own legislation.

Right now, Speaker BOEHNER and Minority Leader MCCONNELL are the only ones standing between Congress and compromise. It is time for them to prove to American families they are more interested in protecting the middle class than pleasing the tea party.

TRIBUTE TO DEPARTING SENATORS

BEN NELSON

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise to honor our colleague the senior Senator

from Nebraska, BEN NELSON, upon his retirement from the Senate. This will become effective after the first of the year.

For 12 years, BEN has been a valued member of the Democratic caucus and an exemplary Senator for Nebraska and the country. But his life in public service dates back to his youth. He spent his college days serving his Nebraska community in another way—as a lay minister. But eventually he chose law over ministry and went to law school. He attended law school at the University of Nebraska, where he got his bachelor's and master's degrees.

He spent many years practicing insurance law. He served as director of the Nebraska Department of Insurance and as president of the Central National Insurance Group. Then, in 1990, he was elected Governor of Nebraska. Four years later, he was reelected—with almost 75 percent of the vote—to become the first Nebraska Governor in 20 years to win a second term. So it was not a surprise when he ran for the Senate in 2000. He won, even though President Bush took Nebraska handily.

It is easy to see BEN NELSON truly possesses the same independent spirit as his Nebraska constituents. He served his constituents with distinction in the Senate and, of course, when he was Governor and as insurance commissioner. He has always provided a strong voice for fiscal responsibility, and he has been terrific for the State's energy industry, agricultural sector, and even tourism.

Similar to many of his Nebraska constituents, Ben is an avid hunter, fisher, and outdoorsman.

As a sidelight, one of the things we learn as kids—and as we get older it is something we must adhere to—is that one should not be envious. Envy isn't something that is very becoming of human beings, especially in an adult. But I think if the truth were known, many Senators would be very envious, as I am—and I would even think the Acting President pro tempore would be—about that hair of BEN NELSON's. I mean that is a mop of real hair.

It is often people call his office and they believe he has a toupee, but it is his hair. He will pull it for you anytime just to show you it is real. I mean he has hair like a 15-year-old. So I have to acknowledge I am a little envious of his hair, and I think, if the truth were known, maybe others are as well.

My wife has said on many occasions—and she tells me this all the time—how handsome PAT LEAHY is and she is so glad he doesn't do a comb-over.

Anyway, BEN NELSON is an avid hunter, fisher, and outdoorsman. He has bagged pheasants and turkey, and one time, to the consternation of all of us, he decided he was going to take Senator SCHUMER from New York hunting for pheasants. He did that. Everybody survived it alive, and BEN NELSON still boasts about that; that he was able to bring SCHUMER back all in one piece. More important, the people who went

hunting with them all came back in one piece. The story goes that Senator SCHUMER even shot a bird or two.

A lot of us have some trouble accepting that, but that is what BEN says and I will take him at his word. He has bagged all kinds of game birds—dove, quail, pheasants, turkey—but he has also had the opportunity to hunt all over the world and has bagged some of the most exotic game that is possible for a hunter to hunt. He is the epitome of a sportsman.

BEN isn't just a great hunter, though. He is also an accomplished practical joker and a wonderful singer. That may surprise some people. In our caucus, I proved to everyone that he could sing, and sing quite well. He recorded a few years ago a song called "Western Town" to raise money for visually impaired children. He was one of a dozen Nebraskan celebrities to record songs for this charity. I obtained a copy of this and played it at a Democratic caucus a few years ago. It was a hit. He was singing—it is his voice—and it was very good. Here is how it goes:

I'm from a western town in Nebraska. Don't know why I left so long ago. All I know is this western town in Nebraska lives in my heart and in my soul.

He did a great job of that song, as he has done everything since I have known him.

I am sure BEN is looking forward to going home to the western town—Omaha—where he lives with his wife Diane. She is wonderful. She was a great first lady and a wonderful Senator's spouse. I like her for lots of reasons, the smile she has, but also she makes some of the best chocolate chip cookies I have ever eaten. They have four children and five grandchildren. As he departs for Omaha, he will be sorely missed here in the Senate.

He has always been a loyal and dedicated member of this caucus, even when he was showing loyalty by questioning the wisdom of the party sometimes. He is arguably the most conservative member of the caucus. And while there are a few things BEN and I disagree on, we agree on most everything. Through the last 12 years he has been a valued member of the team. He has made many of our accomplishments possible through his dedication to country first and State second. That is how it should be.

Edwin Chapin, a North American preacher and poet, said:

No more duty can be urged upon those who are entering the great theater of life than simple loyalty to their best convictions.

BEN NELSON lives by his convictions, even though it may put him at odds with his party or his constituents. His highest duty is to country and his conscience.

We had a retirement party a week ago tomorrow, and when it was over, I grabbed BEN and we embraced. I care a great deal about him. He has made some extremely difficult votes, but he did it because it was the right thing to do. His duty is to country and his con-

science, and I repeat, I have such high respect for BEN NELSON. I will miss him. I have enjoyed working with him.

I congratulate BEN NELSON on his career in public service, including his service in the Senate, and wish him the very best in his retirement.

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 shall be in a period of morning business until 5 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the unanimous consent order, the vote that had been scheduled will be delayed until tomorrow.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COONS). The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RUBIO. We are in morning business; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

TRIBUTE TO JENNI RIVERA

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, before I begin today, I know there are millions of people around the world and in this country who are mourning the loss of a singer by the name of Jenni Rivera, who was a huge star, particularly in Latin America but also in the United States. She died yesterday evening in a plane crash in northern Mexico.

Jenni was a real American success story. She was born in California to immigrants from Mexico. She started working at her father's small record label in Long Beach, CA, and she recorded from there. She made a number of top hits that made all the charts around the world. She was recently in Florida to receive a Billboard Music Award and performed at the Billboard Music Awards. We saw that on TV. My mom was a huge fan of hers—and also kind of the equivalent of "The Voice" in Mexico on the Telemundo network. She passed away last night.

Her calling card was she was a singer in a genre of music that is largely dominated by males. Yet she brought a powerful voice to that genre where she sang frankly about her struggles to give her children a better life in this country. Her death at a young age is a real tragedy. I know there are millions

of people across the country and around the world mourning her loss today. She is survived by her five children and two grandchildren.

Our prayers go out for her that God may grant her family the peace to deal with this difficult circumstance.

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I come here on December 10, Human Rights Day. I want to briefly discuss human rights because, I would just say, while we have made great advances around the world in the cause of human rights, there are still a lot of roads to travel. Today is a good opportunity to take note of some of the struggles and challenges around the world with regard to human rights.

The first issue I want to talk about with regard to human rights is modern-day slavery. When people think about slavery they think about the historic nature of slavery in this country or around the world. It is hard to imagine that today, in the 21st century, that there are slaves in the world. It is even harder to believe there are slaves in the United States, but the fact is there are. It has been well documented that human trafficking around the world numbers in the millions.

Of course, sex trafficking is a big part of that, a grotesque part of that, and we are all aware that it is a very serious problem. So too is forced labor-type slavery, which we find around the world and even in the United States. In fact, there is no major city in the United States that does not have an element of human trafficking and human slavery within its confines. I think it is important to understand that exists, it is real, and it is happening.

To that extent, remember there are things we are trying to do in this legislative body, in the Senate, in Washington, to deal with this issue. One of the issues we are going to have a chance to deal with soon, I hope, is reauthorizing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which was sponsored last year by Senator BROWN and Senator LEAHY. Hopefully, we can finish that before the end of this year, but if we cannot, I hope early in the next Congress we will address it.

As you know, there are also reports that the State Department does rank countries around the world on the efforts they are making to deal with human trafficking, and they actually rank them in three tiers, the third being the worst, those nations not doing enough. I hope we look at how we reform the process of giving some of these countries waivers. There are countries that are perpetually on the list of the worst possible places with regard to government policy toward human trafficking. Yet they are getting waivers from the implications and the consequences of being a tier 3 country. There are countries getting that waiver every single year.