



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 113th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 160

WASHINGTON, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2014

No. 63

Senate

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.

O divine Master, incline the hearts of our lawmakers to follow in Your way. May they seek to stay within the circle of Your providential plan for their lives, striving to please You as they live for Your glory. Lord, deliver them from crooked thoughts, careless words, and selfish hearts. Forgive them for the things undone that ought to have been done and the things done that ought not to have been done. Spirit of purity and grace, guide our Senators with Your power.

We pray in Your strong 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, April 30, 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.

MINIMUM WAGE FAIRNESS ACT—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 354, the minimum-wage legislation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 354, S. 2223, a bill to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage and to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend increased expensing limitations and the treatment of certain real property as section 179 property.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in morning business until 10:30 a.m. this morning. The Republicans will control the first half and the majority will control the final half. Following morning business, the time until noon will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees prior to a cloture vote on the motion to proceed to the minimum-wage bill at 12 p.m. today. At 4 p.m. there will be additional rollcall votes in relation to nominations.

Mr. President, later today, as I have announced, we are going to have, we hope, the beginning of a debate on the increase of the Federal minimum wage. Millions of American workers will be watching how each Senator votes today. To them it is a matter of survival.

They will be observing to see if we ensure that a full-time worker in America receives a livable wage.

For Republicans, this vote will demonstrate whether they truly care about our economy. Republicans have fashioned themselves over the years as defenders of the economy. Congressional Republicans have told the American people they are the party of jobs and financial prosperity. How illogical then that the Senate Republicans today will not be supportive of legislation to increase the minimum wage.

What is preventing my Republican colleagues from giving the American workers a livable wage—a fair shot—knowing that 75 percent of the American people support increasing the minimum wage? If Americans are searching for an answer as to why they would refuse to raise the minimum wage, they should look no farther than the Republicans' billionaire benefactors—I repeat, billionaire benefactors—the Koch brothers. Absolutely no one was surprised yesterday when Americans for Prosperity, which is only one of the Koch-funded political organizations, instructed Republicans in Congress to vote against a minimum-wage increase. They said: We are going to score this vote.

What does that mean? It means if you vote yes, you are not going to get any help from Charlie and David. They want a “no” vote so they can make Charlie and Dave happy.

In case any of their followers in the Senate were to experience a change of heart and be inclined to vote for an increase, the organizations have warned that they will really go after these people. Again, I repeat, score the vote.

In other words, when it comes time for the Koch brothers to play the role of Santa Claus, Republicans should know that Charles and David are making a list and checking it twice—probably more than that. Even though 75 percent of Americans support this legislation—and our economy stands to profit from a wage increase—the will of the Koch brothers seems to be the top priority for my Republican colleagues.

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



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Former Governor Pawlenty, who was considered by many people in the last election cycle to be the right person for the Republicans to nominate for President, came out today strongly and said words to the effect of: I am not afraid of the Koch brothers. I believe the minimum wage should be increased.

My Republican colleagues should listen to this respected Republican leader.

To add to the Republicans' theater of the absurd, the House of Representatives Budget Committee is holding a hearing today on poverty in America. How about that.

The Presiding Officer will recall that committee chairman PAUL RYAN ran for Vice President. He was part of the ticket that labeled 47 percent of Americans as moochers and not deserving the Republicans' attention—moochers. Representative PAUL RYAN himself has even called struggling Americans "takers." Taking into account his well-documented disdain for hard-working Americans trying to help their families, I am anxious to learn how Representative RYAN plans to eradicate poverty since he considers them takers and moochers. Maybe he will need to check with the Koch brothers first, as it seems he did with his recent budget proposal.

While House Republicans hold hearings and Senate Republicans do nothing, Senate Democrats are doing something. We continue to propose meaningful legislation, such as this minimum-wage bill, that gives American families a fair shot at prosperity. The Republicans filibustered extended unemployment benefits. They filibustered giving women the right to make the same amount of money as men. Why should my daughter get 77 cents when a man doing the same job she does gets \$1? It is unfair, but they filibustered that. We are going to continue to propose meaningful legislation.

Senate Republicans assert that increasing the minimum wage will not help working families. That assertion is not only wrong, it makes no sense. It is illogical. Twenty-eight million Americans stand to benefit from an increase in the minimum wage. I repeat: About 10 percent of all Americans stand to gain from the legislation before this body. We are going to vote to see if we can begin debate at noon today.

Republicans assert that boosting the minimum wage would hurt businesses and slow down our economic recovery. Almost 75 percent of small businesses support raising the minimum wage. Why? It creates more business for them. It is good for the economy. The assertion that boosting the minimum wage would hurt businesses, again, is wrong and it is illogical.

Researchers at the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank have found consumer spending increases—yes, increases—dramatically following a minimum-wage hike and businesses reap the benefits of a minimum-wage increase.

That is what these experts said. This minimum-wage legislation is good for American workers, businesses, and the economy, but Republicans refuse to even allow us to debate the issue. Instead, they have signaled their intention to filibuster the minimum-wage legislation just as they have filibustered virtually everything the President suggested during the past 5 years.

When it comes to helping working-class families, the Republicans in Washington are echoing what the Republican leader declared last week in Kentucky: It is not my job to create jobs.

Well, it is his job. It is the Republicans' job, it is my job, and it is the job of every Member of Congress to do everything we can to help create jobs. That is why in addition to raising the minimum wage, which will create jobs, we believe there should be something done about the infrastructure deficit we have in this country which would help create tens of thousands of jobs. It is so badly needed.

Today we have an opportunity to help our hard-working constituents from sea to shining sea and show them that we are attentive to their needs.

I urge my Republican colleagues to join us and Governor Pawlenty and give American workers a fair shot at the American dream by ensuring they are paid a livable wage. At the end of the day our job is to give every American a fair shot to provide for themselves and their families—no welfare, just a job.

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.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 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.

Mr. REID. 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. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

THE MINIMUM WAGE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to start this morning by reading an excerpt from a 1998 memo from Gene Sperling to President Clinton. It relates to a minimum-wage proposal similar to the one we are considering today. Here is what he wrote:

Your entire economic team believes that this approach is too aggressive and are concerned that . . . [it] could prove damaging to employment prospects of low-skilled workers, as well as to the general macroeconomic performance of the economy.

But the memo noted there was a plus side to supporting that proposal. "[It] would unify [the] liberal wing of the Democratic party."

Today feels like déjà vu all over again because even though our constituents keep telling us they expect Washington to focus on jobs, that is clearly not what they are getting from the Senate. Instead, Senate Democrats are pushing legislation today that would cost as many as 1 million jobs in this country—legislation that the left flank of their party demands. That is their response to the pleas of our constituents to do something about jobs—a proposal that nonpartisan analysts tell us could cost jobs.

But then again, these are the same Washington Democrats who have been at the helm of our economy for 5½ years, the same ones who have been bragging about a recovery for the past 4.

We learned this morning the economy grew by just 0.1 percent—0.1 percent. So I can assure you that if this is the Democrats' idea of a recovery, the people in my State at least are not terribly impressed. They are ready for new ideas. They are ready to turn the page from the liberal playbook that just has not worked.

It is clearer every day that the DC liberal establishment is completely out of ideas. They do not even pretend to be serious about jobs anymore. The clearest proof of that is today's vote—on a bill that could cost about 17,000 jobs in Kentucky alone, and potentially as many as a million nationwide.

But Senate Democrats do not seem to care. They do not seem to care that about 6 in 10 Americans oppose a bill like this if—if it means losing hundreds of thousands of American jobs. Washington Democrats' true focus these days seems to be making the far left happy—not helping the middle class.

They seem to think they can coast on talking points and stale ideas and that the American people have not been paying attention to their recent dismal record at actually helping the people they claim to care about.

They seem to think people will not notice that time and time and time again they have ended up making things harder for the people they claim they want to help.

But the American people see through that game. It is crystal clear from new polling that we have seen this week.