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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MARK L. PRYOR, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's opening prayer will be offered by the Reverend Mac Richard, Senior Pastor of Lake Hills Church in Austin, TX.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Our Lord and our God, we thank You for Your favor and Your goodness to our Nation. Lord, in this room where decisions are made on behalf of millions of people, we pause to acknowledge Your power and to thank You for the gift of good government.

Thank You, Lord, for each woman and man who has chosen to serve and lead in this place. I ask that You would bless them, bless and protect their families who also sacrifice so that they might serve. Father, we come to You and ask that You would grant wisdom in this place. Give our leaders eyes to see what might be and the courage to truly lead our Nation.

Lord, You have blessed us with so much prosperity, so much opportunity. May we be faithful with the responsibility these blessings carry. Thank You for the promise of this new day, for the freedom to approach and worship You, and for the ultimate liberty we enjoy in relationship with You.

Father, I ask this prayer in the powerful Name of Jesus. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable MARK L. PRYOR 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, September 24, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MARK L. PRYOR, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. PRYOR 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 leader remarks, there will be a period of morning business, for up to 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each. We will have the morning hour extended until 10:30 so the Democrats and Republicans can divide up that time because we have a cloture vote set for 10:30. The Republicans will control the first half and the Democrats will control the second half.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the Interior appropriations bill. Mr. President, I have spoken to the necessary parties this morning, and I think we are going to be able to work out an agreement so we will not have to have the cloture vote. I hope that is the case. If, in fact, that is the case, we

will vitiate the cloture vote and what we will do—because of the heavy workload of the Finance Committee, and I have spoken to the necessary folks in this regard—we will schedule a time this afternoon to have a block of votes so they can come over at once and not have to keep going back and forth. We hope to work that out.

We made progress on this legislation yesterday, and if we can get these block of votes out of the way, we will move on to our next appropriations bill, which will be the Defense appropriations bill. This comes at a very important time in the history of our country, with troops coming out of Iraq and the situation we have developing in Afghanistan. Mr. President, you can announce morning business now.

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 proceed to a period of morning business for up to 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak 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 and the majority controlling the second half.

The majority leader.

FILING DEADLINE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I forgot to announce that the filing deadline for second-degree amendments is at 10:30 this morning.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Tennessee.

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



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HEALTH CARE

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I see the majority leader is still on the floor, and I wish to thank him and the Republican leader for organizing last night's reception honoring Henry Clay, a great Senator, whose portrait will be hanging in the stairway outside of here. There was a time in history when Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John Calhoun were better known than the Presidents of the United States. That was in the 1850s, before the Civil War. It was good to take a moment all together, Democrats and Republicans, and think about that history and to honor the man who was known as the great compromiser, who during a time when our Nation was completely split over the Civil War, on three different occasions, found a way to try to bring it together. Of course, he died before the great war.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that during the Republican morning business time I be permitted to enter into a colloquy with my colleagues Senator MCCAIN, Senator COBURN, Senator BROWBACK, Senator THUNE, and Senator MURKOWSKI, who will be here shortly.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, health care reform is the agenda for the Nation and it ought to be. We, on the Republican side, want health care reform, but we want the right kind of health care reform. Our focus is on costs. Our focus is on the cost to each American as he or she buys their health care policy; our focus is on the cost of the Government of the United States, for which each American has a responsibility to pay. What we have to do is to reduce costs to make it easier for Americans to afford their health care and to afford their government.

Every single one of us knows that unless we reduce the increasing costs of health care we will not be able to pay our bills in Washington, DC. We are in the midst of appropriations bills, and there is well-meaning debate here about whether we should spend more money for national parks and for safe drinking water and other urgent needs we have. That is the bill we are talking about today—clean air. Well, we should spend money on those urgent needs. Americans want us to do that. But we can't have those dollars, as the Senator from Alabama pointed out yesterday, if we continue to increase the debt—trillions in debt—and run up the interest rate bill.

We are headed toward a situation where, by the end of this decade, we will be spending \$800 billion a year on debt—more than we spend on national defense, eight times as much as we spend from Washington on education this year. So those dollars could either be in the pockets of the American people for them to spend for themselves or we could be spending those dollars to clean the air, to relieve traffic conges-

tion or to provide Pell grants and student loans so Americans can go back to school. Those are the things government ought to be spending money on, not on increasing debt.

So health care reform is, first, about cost—the cost to Americans for their own health care policies and the cost of their debt. The President noted this the other night and said in his remarks to us and to the American people that the health care bill couldn't add one dime to the deficit. That is reassuring because the President's proposals are already adding \$9 trillion to the deficit over the next 10 years. He is doubling or tripling the national debt, which means he is adding more to the debt by a factor of two and then three than all the other Presidents put together. So surely we don't want to add more to it with a health care reform bill.

But when the President said that, he completely wiped out all the Democratic health care bills that have been proposed so far from the House and from the Senate. The Congressional Budget Office has said the Senate HELP Committee and the bills in the House all add to the debt in the first 10 years and in the years after that. So they should be off the table, according to the President's own standards.

Now we are looking at the Finance Committee in the Senate to see what they can do. Mr. BAUCUS, the Senator from Montana, has worked very hard in a good-faith, bipartisan way to try to develop a bipartisan bill—a comprehensive bill. But as we read the bill, there are a great many things to be worried about. For example, if you don't buy a health care plan, the IRS will tax you.

The President and George Stephanopoulos, on a Sunday show—and Senator GRAHAM said the President seemed to be on every Sunday show except the Food Channel—were talking about the definition of tax. So that is the first thing. The second is the Medicare cuts.

I see the Senator from Arizona has come, and I would say to the Senator, through the Chair, we have received permission from the Chair to engage in a colloquy between myself and other Republican Senators who might come. I have already pointed out that the President himself has disqualified all the plans our committee worked on, the HELP Committee and from the House, because they all add to the debt. Now we see the Baucus plan coming forward, and I wonder if the Senator from Arizona has had an opportunity to look at—of course, that is not a bill yet. We all understand that. It is just concepts, and we will want to make sure we have time to read the bill and to know what it costs. But I wonder if the Senator from Arizona has had an opportunity yet to form an opinion about whether the Baucus bill does what we had hoped, which is reduce the cost to the American people of what their insurance costs and reduce the cost to the American people of their government in Washington.

Mr. MCCAIN. Well, I thank my colleague from Tennessee and the great

work he has been doing. First of all, I would ask my friend if he has had the same experience I have had at townhall meetings and that is from one of the hand-done signs—not printed-out signs but one of the hand-done signs—which says: Have you read the bill? One of the first questions at the townhall meeting was: Have you read the bill? Of course, that is an impossibility for anyone to read the bill because there is no bill before the Finance Committee, it is my understanding. I understand it is about 200 pages of a "framework." I think the Senator from Tennessee and I are keenly aware that many times there is a comma, a word inserted here, a word taken out there which changes the entire legislative impact.

The American people are a lot smarter than we give them credit for. They know that in the middle of the night, many times legislation is written and turned into the kind of legislation that, frankly, unless you go through it page by page, word by word, you don't know the final impact. So what I, first, wish to say to my friend from Tennessee is that apparently the Finance Committee is working to turn out a legislative package that is not in legislative form, and I am curious how the Members would understand what is in it.

I guess the second point is, there is still no serious consideration of a couple of the fundamentals—medical malpractice or medical liability reform or, obviously, the ability to go across State lines to purchase insurance and allowing small businesses to pool their assets so they can compete for health insurance policies that large corporations are able to.

The other question I would ask, because I know my friend from Tennessee has had many roles in his long political life, has the Senator from Tennessee, as a former Governor, had any contact with the Governors and their organizations as to how much additional costs would be added to those States, which are already in dire shape—certainly mine is—in the form of additional Medicaid costs?

I notice the majority leader at first complained about the bill and the cost it might accrue to his State of Nevada, but I guess that has been fixed to his satisfaction. But I don't think the other States—a State such as mine, which is still looking at over a \$50 billion deficit—probably would be eager to absorb dramatically increased Medicaid costs. I wonder if my friend, a former Governor, former Cabinet member, former candidate for President, former dog catch—excuse me, someone who has had many roles in American life, would respond to that.

Mr. ALEXANDER. One of my friends said to me after I was Governor: Rooster today, feather duster tomorrow. And I am afraid I am in the feather duster category.

The Senator has made a terrific point. I want to go to the Senator from Oklahoma, who has just arrived, to