

Mr. BURRIS 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, the Senate will resume consideration of the health reform legislation. Following leader remarks, the time until 12:30 will be for debate only. The majority will control the first half of the time allotted until 12:30. The Republicans will control the next half. The remaining time will be equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees. The Senate will recess from 12:30 until 2:15 p.m. to allow for the weekly caucus luncheons. There are two amendments now pending. One is the Nelson of Nebraska amendment and the other is the McCain motion to commit. Senators should expect votes after the recess in relation to the pending amendment and motion.

NEW DEMOCRATIC SENATORS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we have scheduled this morning, as soon as the leader time is used, a group of Democratic Senators. These are all new Senators. I hope those people who are watching understand the quality of the people who are now going to make a presentation before this body. The States that will be represented here today will be Oregon, Delaware, New Hampshire, Colorado—we have two Colorado Senators who will speak—the new Senator from Massachusetts, New Mexico, Virginia, Illinois, Alaska, and the opening will be by Senator MERKLEY and the closing will be by Senator MERKLEY. Such quality individuals we are so fortunate to have in the Senate. I am grateful for the time they have taken to speak on this issue. Much of what they have done has set the tone for this debate on our side of the aisle. It has been constructive, it has been positive, and it has been very lucid. They were all successful individuals before they came to the Senate. Certainly, that is acknowledged every time we hear one of them say a word here on the Senate floor.

Would the Chair announce the matter before the Senate.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

SERVICEMEMBERS HOME OWNERSHIP TAX ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the

Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3590, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3590) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the first-time home buyers credit in the case of members of the Armed Forces and certain other Federal employees, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Reid amendment No. 2786, in the nature of a substitute.

Nelson (NE) amendment No. 2962 (to amendment No. 2786), to prohibit the use of Federal funds for abortions.

McCain motion to commit the bill to the Committee on Finance, with instructions.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the time until 12:30 p.m. will be for debate only, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first hour and the Republicans controlling the next hour.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, over the past several days, Americans have seen in vivid detail what some supporters of this plan plan to do for the Medicare Program for seniors. They plan to use it as a giant piggy bank to pay for an entirely new government program. Yesterday, we heard floated, for the very first time, that they want to radically expand Medicare. So what is becoming abundantly clear is that the majority will make any deal, agree to any terms, sign any dotted line that brings them closer to final passage of this terrible bill. They entertain adding new experiments without any assessment of the impact this backroom deal-making will have on the American people or our economy. They are, for lack of a better term, winging it on one of the most consequential pieces of legislation affecting our country in memory.

Let me suggest to the majority, Americans would much rather we get it right than scurry around, throwing together untested, last-minute experiments in order to get 60 votes before Christmas. Let me say that again. Americans would much rather we get it right than scurry around, throwing together untested, last-minute experiments in order to get 60 votes before Christmas.

Over the past several days, our friends on the other side repeatedly voted to preserve nearly \$½ trillion in Medicare cuts to finance their vision of reform, a vision that includes cutting nearly \$8 billion from hospice care, \$40 billion in cuts to home health agencies, \$120 billion in cuts to Medicare Advantage, \$135 billion in cuts to hospitals that serve Medicare patients, and nearly \$15 billion in cuts to nursing homes. What these cuts really illustrate is a lack of vision because cutting one trou-

bled government program in order to create another is a mistake. I will say that again: \$½ trillion in cuts to Medicare for seniors is not reform.

But Medicare cuts are just one leg of the stool holding up this misguided vision of reform. Let's take a look at another. Let's look at how this bill punishes not only seniors but how it kills jobs at a time when 1 in 10 working Americans is looking for one. This bill doesn't just punish seniors, it punishes job creators too.

That is the message we got yesterday from small businesses across the country. They sent us a letter opposing this bill because it doesn't do the things proponents of this bill promised it would. It doesn't lower costs, it doesn't help create jobs, and it doesn't help the economy. Here are just some of the groups that signed that letter: the Associated Builders and Contractors, the Associated General Contractors, the International Food Service Distributors Association, the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Association of Wholesale Distributors, the National Retail Federation, Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Here is what these groups had to say about this bill. I am reading from their letter dated December 7, 2009, a letter that was addressed to every Member of the Senate:

In order to finance part of its \$2.5 trillion price tag, HR 3590 imposes new taxes, fees and penalties totaling nearly half a trillion dollars. This financial burden falls disproportionately on the backs of small business. Small firms are in desperate need of this precious capital for job creation, investment, business expansion, and survival.

The letter goes on to detail all the ways in which this bill punishes small businesses, thus making it harder for them to retain or hire workers. These groups point out that under this bill, small businesses in the United States would see major cost increases as a result of new taxes on health benefits and health insurance, costs that would be passed on to employees and which would make health insurance more expensive, not less.

Under this bill, self-employed business owners who buy coverage for themselves could see a double-digit jump in their insurance premiums. For other small businesses, the bill won't lead to a significant decrease in cost—something they were promised as a result of the bill.

Under this bill, jobs would be lost and wages depressed as a result of a new law that would require businesses either to buy insurance for their employees or to pay a fine.

Needless to say, this is not the kind of legislation the American worker needs or wants at a moment of double-digit unemployment. Perhaps that is the reason that poll after poll after public opinion poll shows that the American worker opposes this bill.

Some business groups may have supported this plan earlier in the year because they thought it was inevitable.