LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

NATIONAL HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES WEEK

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 269, which was submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 269) designating the week beginning September 19, 2011, as ''National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week.''

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. BENNET. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 269) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 269

Whereas there are 105 historically Black colleges and universities in the United States;

Whereas historically Black colleges and universities provide the quality education essential to full participation in a complex, highly technological society;

Whereas historically Black colleges and universities have a rich heritage and have played a prominent role in the history of the United States;

Whereas historically Black colleges and universities allow talented and diverse students, many of whom represent underserved populations, to attain their full potential through higher education; and

Whereas the achievements and goals of historically Black colleges and universities are deserving of national recognition: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates the week beginning September 19, 2011, as ''National Historically Black Colleges and Universities Week''; and

(2) calls on the people of the United States and interested groups to observe the week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs to demonstrate support for historically Black colleges and universities in the United States.

MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—H.R. 2587

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill for the first time.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2587) to prohibit the National Labor Relations Board from ordering any employer to close, relocate, or transfer employment under any circumstance.

Mr. BENNET. I now ask for a second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to my own request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The bill will have its second reading on the next legislative day.

ORDERS FOR FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2011

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m. on Friday, September 16; that following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, and the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day; that following any leader remarks, the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

PROGRAM

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, there will be no rollcall votes on Friday. The next rollcall vote will be Monday, September 19, at 5:30 p.m.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent it adjourn under the previous order, following the remarks of Senator WHITEHOUSE.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island is recognized.

COSTS OF HEALTH CARE

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, we all traveled over to the House Chamber a few days ago to hear President Obama present his jobs plan, a jobs plan for which I intend to support and fight. But during the course of that speech, we also heard the President indicate that he was going to come and make some recommendations to the Senate and to the House regarding our debt and deficit strategy.

I come to the floor today to urge the White House, in dealing with our debt and our deficit issues, to pursue a strategy for cost reduction in our health care system that does not rely on harmful cuts to our seniors' Medicare benefits. I cannot tell you how important this is in Rhode Island where we have a significant senior population. Many of our seniors are low income. The average Social Security benefit is around $13,000 to $14,000.

Some of the ideas that have been floated in this body—more than just floated; they have actually passed the Congress, the House of Representatives—would be devastating to Rhode Island seniors: an end to Medicare in 10 years; $6,000 in increased costs to each senior, on average, per year, hidden in what the Republicans like to call their cut, cap and balance plan, with an even worse attack on Medicare and on Medicare beneficiaries than was in the House budget that passed, which was a bad enough attack on its own. That simply is more than seniors in Rhode Island can manage. It is not fair; it is not right. And, most importantly it is not necessary.

I do concede that rising health care spending has placed a lot of stress on our national budget. In the joint session of Congress in September 2009, President Obama himself said: Put simply, our health care problem is our deficit problem. Nothing else even comes close.

If you go to the other side of the political spectrum and to the other Chamber of Congress, Congressman RYAN said: Our debt and deficit problem is, at its core, a health care problem. I agree with that. We need to address it. The question is how.

The fundamental fact that so many of our colleagues overlook in their urgency to attack Medicare—a program that Republicans have been against from its very founding and that the renewed tea party assault on Medicare has revived—has misled the debate, because the cost problem in Medicare is not a problem that is unique to Medicare. Wherever you look in the American health care system, costs are exploding. They are going up in Medicare probably at a lower rate than other quadrants of the health care sector, but they are going up. They are going up in Medicaid. States are having trouble dealing with that burden. They are going up in TRICARE and in veterans' care. Indeed, Secretary Gates said: Health care costs are eating the Defense Department alive. Eating the Defense Department alive, health care costs are. And if you are in private insurance, whether it is Kaiser or United or Blue Cross, pick your insurer, the costs are going up dramatically. Our own hospitals in Rhode Island, which provide health care, are watching their health care costs accelerate at significant rates far above a multiple of our rate of inflation.

This problem of rising health care costs is creating real strain. It is not just creating strain on the Federal budget—granted, it is creating strain in the Federal budget—but it is also creating incredible stress on seniors, on small business owners who can't afford health insurance for themselves, or have to whittle away at the health insurance their employees have in order to keep it affordable, or have to give it up entirely as they face the stresses of this economic downturn.

As the Presiding Officer, the senior Senator from Colorado, knows because