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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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.

Eternal Spirit, we rejoice in the hope we receive from Your mercies. Fill our lawmakers with strength for today and faith for tomorrow. Show them Your unfailing love as You provide them with Your wisdom to meet the challenges they face. May they trust You completely, whether in the sunshine or storm. Help them to remember the many times You have helped them when they had no solutions for their problems. Lord, lead them to be such true stewards of our national trust that they will transmit this Nation to our descendents far greater than it is today.

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 legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, Wednesday, July 9, 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.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 12 noon today. During that period of time Senators will be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each with the time equally divided and controlled between the leaders or their designees.

At noon the Senate will turn to executive session and proceed on votes on the confirmation of three nominations: Julian Castro, the mayor of San Antonio, TX, to be the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Darci Vetter to be Chief Agricultural Negotiator, Office of the United States Trade Representative; and William Adams to be Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Humanities. There will be a rollcall vote on the confirmation of the Castro nomination, and we expect only voice votes on the confirmation of Vetter and Adams.

Upon disposition of the Adams nomination, there will be a vote on the motion to proceed to S. 2363, the bipartisan Hagan sportsmen's act. We expect that vote to be by voice also.

Senators should expect one rollcall vote then today at noon.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2569

Mr. REID. Mr. President, S. 2569 is due for a second reading, I am told.

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

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2569) to provide an incentive for businesses to bring jobs back to America.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this is legislation sponsored by Senator WALSH of Montana. I object to any further proceedings at this time, and I look forward to working with him in the future on this legislation.

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

SALUTING THE FLAG

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday I mentioned to the Senate that I had been reading a book by Caroline Kennedy called ''A Patriot's Handbook.'' I have been looking at the book. It was given to my wife for Mother's Day a number of years ago.

I mentioned yesterday that I read about one of JOHN MCCAIN's experiences in a Vietnam prison camp. It will take me just a minute and a half or so to read this, but this is what I paraphrased yesterday that I will read today. It is ''The Mike Christian Story'' by Senator JOHN MCCAIN in his book ''Faith of Our Fathers.''

Mike was a Navy Bombardier-navigator who had been shot down in 1967, about 6 months before I arrived. He had grown up near Selma, Alabama. His family was poor. He had not worn shoes until he was 13 years old. Character was their wealth. They were good, righteous people, and they raised Mike to be hardworking and loyal. He was 17 when he enlisted in the Navy. As a young sailor, he showed promise as a leader and impressed his superiors enough to be offered a commission.

What packages we were allowed to receive from our families often contained handkerchiefs, scarves, and other clothing items. For some time, Mike had been taking little scraps of red and white cloth, and with a needle he had fashioned from a piece of bamboo he laboriously sewed an American flag into the inside of his prisoner's shirt. Every afternoon, before we ate our soup, we would hang

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

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Mike's flag on the wall of our cell and together recite the Pledge of Allegiance. No other event of the day had as much meaning to us.

The guards discovered Mike's flag one afternoon during a routine inspection and confiscated it. They returned that evening and took Mike outside. For our benefit as much as Mike's, they beat him severely, just outside our cell, puncturing his eardrum and breaking several of his ribs. When they finished, they dragged him bleeding and nearly senseless back into our cell, and we helped him crawl to his place on the sleeping platform. After things quieted down, we all lay down to go to sleep. Before drifting off, I happened to look toward a corner of the room, where one of the four naked light bulbs that were always illuminated in our cell cast a dim light on Mike Christian. He had crawled there when he thought the rest of us were sleeping. With his eyes nearly swollen shut from the beating, he had quietly picked up his needle and thread and begun sewing a new flag.

I witnessed many acts of heroism in prison, but none braver than that. As I watched him, I felt a surge of pride at serving with him, and an equal measure of humility for lacking that extra ration of courage that distinguished Mike Christian from other men.

I mentioned this yesterday because I had it in my mind when we saluted the flag. I said yesterday—and I will repeat and paraphrase today—when we salute the flag, we should remember the Mike Christians of the world who sacrificed so much so that we can salute the flag.

A FAIR SHOT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I love baseball season. I have never had the good fortune of having a team I grew up with, as has my colleague, the senior Senator from Illinois—Cubs fan, where he lives, White Sox fan—but I have loved baseball since I was a little boy. I love baseball season. I go to games. I think I can go to one this Saturday, unless something comes up. But I do go home at night—and I have spoken with the Republican leader about the pleasure we get from watching a little bit of the baseball games every evening. I do enjoy that.

I have watched over the years these managers. I spent so much time in southern Nevada, in Las Vegas. The baseball team most everyone in Las Vegas watched and listened to was the Los Angeles Dodgers, and the manager for much of that time, after I came back here, was Tommy Lasorda, and he was like so many managers, he was a character. He was a showman. I assume he picked some of the times to pick a fight with the umpire because he was upset with a call, but I think part of it was his idea that the team needed something a little extra. Tommy Lasorda would go out there, and he was famous for kicking the dirt and yelling loudly at the umpire and making sure he used a lot of swear words. That was the manager. He wasn't the only one. Tommy Lasorda comes to my mind. And, on occasion, he would get thrown out of the game.

Why did he do this? Was he upset at the call? At times it got real ugly, with chest thumping and, as I indicated, kicking dirt. Lou Pinella was famous for that. He would kick dirt sometimes on an umpire and it usually got him kicked out of the game. As I indicated, they tried to keep it clean, but those baseball managers and players sometimes have a vocabulary that is for locker rooms and they would say mean-spirited things to the umpire, and certainly what they said wasn't suitable for children.

A lot of times they exited the game after being told they were ejected to divert attention from what was going on with their team. It was a gimmick many times, a distraction meant to sidetrack one side and rally the other.

In the House of Representatives, the Republican leadership is trying a similar tactic by threatening to bring a lawsuit against the President of the United States. They are searching desperately for something—anything—to keep the radicals within their own pockets over there happy. That is hard to do, as we have seen. They want to do this to divert the American people's attention from their very own inaction.

The Presiding Officer doesn't have to take my word for it—no one has to—because conservative pundits are falling over themselves to criticize this ploy. Even last night, Sarah Palin—what did Sarah Palin say? She said, ''You don't bring a lawsuit to a gun fight, and there's no room for lawyers on our front lines.'' That is Sarah Palin. That is what she thinks of the action by the Republican leadership in the House. She wants to go even further, whatever that is.

One Republican pundit said it was political theater. Another called the lawsuit feckless.

However they choose to label it, there is one thing that conservatives, liberals, and moderates agree on: This lawsuit is nothing more than a political stunt. It is nothing more than kicking dirt at the umpire. This feeble attempt to pick a fight with President Obama is intended to draw attention away from the House's inertia on issues important to the American people, such as immigration. More than a year ago we passed immigration and the other House has refused to do anything about it, creating lots of problems, and causing this great country of ours to go further in debt. One trillion dollars would result in reducing our debt if we could pass that legislation. We did it; the House should do it.

All we are asking is that the middle class get a fair shot, whether it is raising the minimum wage, whether it is student debt, which is stunningly high—the highest debt we have in America today is student debt, $1.3 trillion. We need to do something about fair pay for women, that they get the same money men get for doing the very same work. A fair shot—that is what the American middle class deserves, and the House Republicans are refusing to give them any shot at fairness.

Instead of considering all of these important legislative initiatives—I mentioned only a few—the tea party House is content to put on a show, to kick a little dirt—a big, expensive show, in many instances. Who pays for the charade they are talking about over there? The American taxpayers.

Let me give one example. Benghazi. Benghazi was a tragedy, but there is no political conspiracy. Here is what they have done, mostly in the House: 13 public hearings, 15 Member and staff briefings, over 25,000 pages of documents from the White House. Now they are using taxpayer money on a large-scale stunt that isn't new for them. They have other stunts such as the supposed lawsuit. But they have now set up a 12-member Benghazi panel they are creating. They intend to spend $3.3 million this year—this year, which has just a few months left in it—$3.3 million, as they try once again to turn a real tragedy into some kind of a conspiracy.

To put that number in perspective, think about this: The Benghazi panel will outspend the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs. The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs has 25 Members of Congress and it has about 30 staff members. The Benghazi little program they are putting on over there will spend more money than the entire Veterans Affairs' Committee in the House.

We are still waiting for the House to come together with us to do something about the veterans emergency we have. They have forgotten about what is going on around the country. We need thousands of new personnel in the Veterans Affairs Department, and the House refuses to complete the conference with Chairman SANDERS.

Much like the other sideshows put on by the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, this so-called lawsuit is baseless. When Sarah Palin thinks you are going too far, you better take a look at it by the tea party-driven House over there. And the House direction of the lawsuit—people keep asking the House leadership: On what are you going to sue him? They do not know. They are working on it. But they are going to have a lawsuit. They are going to kick around a little dirt. I am in no position to offer legal guidance, but I have been in court a few times. You know your case is in big trouble when you cannot specify the reason you are filing the lawsuit.

So the leadership in the House of Representatives should put aside this ill-fated venture and leave the chest-bumping and dirt-kicking charade to baseball managers.

President Obama is doing something to solve problems, and Republicans are suing him because they want to do nothing, and that is sad. Republicans in the House would be better served spending their efforts and resources passing legislation, giving the middle class a fair shot.