

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. STEVENS).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 22, 2005.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JOHN WARNER, a Senator from the State of Virginia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

USA PATRIOT ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. In my capacity as the senior Senator from Virginia, I ask unanimous consent that the Chair now lay before the Senate the House message to accompany S. 2167.

The legislative clerk read as follows:
S. 2167

Resolved, That the bill from the Senate (S. 2167) entitled "An Act to amend the USA PATRIOT ACT to extend the sunset of certain provisions of that Act and the lone wolf provision of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 to July 1, 2006", do pass with the following amendment:

(1) Page 2, line 10 of the Senate engrossed bill, strike out [July 1, 2006] and insert: *February 3, 2006*.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate concur in the House amendment and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF SIGNING AND
APPOINTMENT AUTHORITIES

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. In my capacity as the senior Senator from Virginia, I now ask unanimous consent that all applicable signing and appointment authorities be extended through the adjournment of the Senate, and that the senior Senator from Virginia be authorized to sign duly enrolled bills and joint resolutions.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

PRINTING OF S. 1783

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. In my capacity as the senior Senator from Virginia, I ask unanimous consent that the text of S. 1783, as passed by the Senate be printed.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AP-
PROPRIATIONS CONFERENCE RE-
PORT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, last night we passed the Department of Defense

Appropriations Conference Report. We all know how important that bill is to our country and our troops. Prior to passing that bill, we were successful in removing provisions to allow drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Those provisions had no place in that bill.

As was noted on the floor last night, there were other provisions that did not belong in the conference report. They were not included in the House- or Senate-passed bills. They were not at all related to the Department of Defense's appropriations. In fact, conferees had been assured that these provisions would not be included at all.

But Republican leaders swept in and declared that they would be included, in violation of promises and the rules. And that is not the worst part. The provisions themselves bestow on drug companies sweeping immunity from the consequences of reckless wrongdoing. It was the Republican leadership's big Christmas present to their friends in the drug industry.

This immunity extends to all aspects of the development and production of drugs or vaccines so long as they are used to prevent, treat, or diagnose what the administration declares an "epidemic." Republican leaders have insisted that these provisions are about preparing for pandemic flu or bioterrorist attack. They are exploiting our fears to go well beyond that.

What is an "epidemic"? Secretary Leavitt recently said obesity is an "epidemic." Many have said diabetes, heart disease, and methamphetamine addiction are epidemics. And it gets worse. The provisions also apply to any product that mitigates the side effects of a drug used to counteract an epidemic. That could include pain or high blood pressure medication.

Even reckless or grossly negligent drug companies will not be held responsible for the injuries they cause. The provisions in the conference report only allow for an injured patient to hold a drug company responsible if he or she can prove using clear and convincing evidence that the company acted with "willful misconduct." This burden is virtually impossible to meet.

This gift to the drug companies comes at the expense of injured patients and the success of our future programs to ensure vaccinations. The provisions establish a "compensation fund," but provide no money for it. Patients who are injured by products covered under this legislation will find that because there is no money in the fund, there is no compensation.

Under this administration's watch, the absence of a promise of compensation resulted in the failure of the program to vaccinate first responders for smallpox. The legislation we passed last night creates the same problem and condemns future similar vaccination programs to failure. Who can blame people for saying no when we are asking to take the risks of what may be an adverse effect if they are not assured that we will take care of them?

Mr. President, the inclusion of these policies in the DOD Appropriations bill was not just bad form, it was bad for Americans. I strongly opposed their inclusion. And I am strongly committed to revisiting this damage in the first days of our return.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
APPROPRIATIONS

● Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, I wholeheartedly support the provisions of the Department of Defense appropriations bill that provide money for our brave military men and women. I support the much needed 3.1 percent pay increase. And I support the Blackhawk MEDEVAC and Utility Helicopters, and Wireless Communication Systems for Montana's National Guard.

But this was not a clean bill. Although I voted for the bill, I take offense to a number of provisions that have nothing to do with our troops. These additions should never have been included in the Defense bill in the first place. They don't belong here.

We have focused our discussion over the past few days on drilling in Alaska. And I am proud that our defense bill does not include ANWR.

But in objecting to ANWR, we have forgotten other changes in the conference report, last minute additions that have no place in a defense bill. I am referring to the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act.

The Emergency Preparedness Act virtually eliminates liability for pharmaceutical companies. Now drug companies have wholesale immunity except in the case of "willful misconduct." Drug companies will no longer be held responsible for negligence or recklessness. Only if they had actual knowledge that their product would injure or kill someone would we hold them accountable.

The Emergency Preparedness Act also sets up an unfunded compensation fund. Without any money appropriated to the fund, the fund is inoperable. This could allow drug companies to remove themselves from responsibility without providing the American people with the recourse they deserve.

Although I support the Defense bill we passed, I do not support the Emergency Preparedness Act. This section was added at the last minute. And it only passed because all of us in the Senate wanted to provide support for our troops.●

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 8:03 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by