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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Monday, January 27, 2003, at 2 p.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, JANUARY 23, 2003

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The prayer this morning will be offered by our guest Chaplain, Father Daniel P. Coughlin, the Chaplain of the House of Representatives.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Father Daniel P. Coughlin, offered the following prayer:

Francis of Assisi wrote many years ago to the rulers of his people: "Keep a clear eye toward life's end. Do not forget your purpose and destiny as God's creature. What you are in His sight is what you are and nothing more. Do not let worldly cares and anxieties or the pressures of office blot out the divine life within you or the voice of God's Spirit guiding in your great task of leading humanity to wholeness. If you open yourself to God and His plan printed deeply in your heart, God will open Himself to you."

Lord God, may Your grace and presence be with the Members of the Senate as they fulfill the duties of their office and serve You by serving the people of these United States. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning there will be a period for morning business until the hour of 10:45 a.m. At 10:45 a.m., the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 2, the appropriations bill. Under the order of last night, at 11 a.m., the Senate will proceed to a series of up to three votes in relation to the pending amendments to the appropriations measure. The first vote will be in relation to the Feingold amendment No. 200 regarding expanded international military education. The second vote will be in relation to the Mikulski amendment No. 61 on public-private competition. The third vote will be on the Murray amendment No. 39 regarding the community action program. Following those votes, the managers will continue to work through any remaining amendments. It is hoped we will be able to complete action on this bill at a reasonable time today.

I thank the Democratic leader and whip for their assistance in reaching short time agreements on the amendments that were offered yesterday. We made tremendous progress over the last 36 hours. I thank all Members of this body for their cooperation in coming to the Chamber to offer their amendments and limiting their remarks. A great deal of progress was made yesterday, and if we are able to

continue that good work over the course of today, I believe we will finish this bill and complete these 11 appropriations bills sometime today.

Again, I announce to my colleagues if we complete this bill today, there will be no session of the Senate on Friday.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALLARD). The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, under the direction of the Democratic leader, we have been able to move a lot of amendments. We also have about six amendments left on this side at this stage, or maybe a couple of others may pop up, but that is what we have. The managers of the bill are going to try to move a bunch of amendments shortly. I think we have an opportunity to finish this bill some time early this evening.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the time for morning business be divided, with the Republicans getting the last half and the Democrats getting the first half.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning

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



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business, not to extend beyond the hour of 10:45 a.m., with the time to be equally divided and Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. STEVENS. Will the Senator yield for a moment?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be 1 minute on each side prior to the votes on the three amendments this morning.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That has already been ordered.

Mr. STEVENS. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

QUALIFYING INDIVIDUAL PROGRAM AND THE STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE

Mr. BINGAMAN. I thank the Chair. Mr. President, I wish to use a few moments of morning business to talk about and describe two amendments I have proposed to the pending legislation. I hope these are amendments that can be unanimously agreed to by all Senators. They seem to me to make eminent sense and, clearly, are in the best interest of our country and the people we represent.

The first amendment I wish to speak about is amendment No. 138. This amendment, which Senator KENNEDY is cosponsoring with me, would extend a critical Federal-State program that assists low-income Medicare beneficiaries to pay the health premiums under the Medicare Program. It uses the Medicaid Program to do that. It is a program that was enacted in 1997. It was slated to be reauthorized at the end of 2002, but, of course, Congress did not enact either Medicaid or Medicare legislation in the 107th Congress. The program was extended by the continuing resolutions that we have enacted in the last few months. It was extended until March 12 of this year.

The amendment I have offered will extend that program through September 30 of this year to give us additional time to do a more complete extension.

This program is known as the QI-1 Program. It is the Qualifying Individual Program. It is a program within Medicaid. It is a block grant payment to States to pay the Medicare Part B premium of \$58.70 per month, and it is a program that will allow States to pay that premium for individuals who have incomes of somewhere between \$887 a month and \$997 a month, or couples with an income of \$1,194 a month up to \$1,344 a month. This covers Medicare beneficiaries whose income is between 120 and 135 percent of the Federal poverty level.

This amounts to a benefit of nearly \$700 annually that many older and disabled Americans depend upon to pay

for a portion of their health care costs and items such as prescription drugs and supplemental coverage. There are well over 120,000 people nationwide who currently rely on the QI-1 Program. These 120,000 people will be hard pressed to afford Medicare coverage without this assistance.

In short, to prevent the erosion of existing low-income protections, Congress needs to extend this 5-year Federal allocation for the QI-1 Program through the remainder of this fiscal year.

According to the data of the Kaiser Family Foundation, there are over 9 million Medicare beneficiaries with incomes between 100 percent of poverty and 175 percent of poverty. Although we do not know the exact number eligible for this particular program of Medicare beneficiaries who are between 120 and 135 percent of poverty, we can estimate there are at least 1 million who are eligible for the program. As I have indicated, there are 120,000 people currently enrolled.

In my home State, for example, we have almost 1,000 New Mexicans enrolled in the QI-1 Program. Disenrolling these low-income Medicare beneficiaries would cost each and every one of them about \$700 annually. This could have a significant impact not only on their finances but on their health.

In a letter from the Medicare Rights Center, they give an example of a 69-year-old widow with severe arthritis, with hypertension, with high cholesterol, in the Nation's Capital. This woman, I refer to as Mrs. B, does not qualify for Medicaid, yet she cannot afford premiums for a Medicare HMO or Medigap plan. This QI-1 Program, which we are seeking in this amendment to extend, does cover her Part B premium of over \$700 per year. If she loses that assistance, she does not know how she can make ends meet. She already struggles to buy food, make the Medicare copayment, and purchase prescription drugs.

This is a bipartisan issue. President Bush had included QI-1 reauthorization in his fiscal year 2003 budget. Moreover, in his confirmation testimony to be the Commissioner of the FDA, Mark McClellan testified that the administration continues to support reauthorization of this program. In addition, QI-1 reauthorization was also included as part of S. 3018, the Beneficiary Access to Care and Medicare Equity Act of 2002, which was introduced by my colleagues, Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY, late last year.

During each and every Senate race this past fall, candidates from both sides of the aisle promised our Nation's seniors and disabled Medicare beneficiaries improved health coverage with the addition of prescription drug coverage. While waiting for that to come about, low-income Medicare beneficiaries should not be blindsided by the loss of critically needed premium protection that the QI-1 Program provides.

I urge passage of this amendment, when we get to it, for another 6½ months. I implore my colleagues to address the issue and to permanently extend the program once that issue becomes appropriate to consider.

Mr. President, another amendment I have filed, amendment No. 126, is an amendment to provide permanent authority to operate the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. The Strategic Petroleum Reserve is the major tool the United States has to deal with the impact of a significant disruption in oil supplies. Releasing oil from the SPR, as it is referred to, in coordination with stock drawdowns with other consuming nations pursuant to the international energy agreement, can add more supply to a tight market, can reduce the possibility of price spikes, and reduce the possibility of economic havoc as the United States experienced during the Arab oil embargo.

We are currently experiencing a disruption in oil supplies from Venezuela. We face the possibility of an additional disruption if we wind up going to war with Iraq and during the aftermath of any conflict in Iraq. In this context, it should be of concern to all Senators that the current authority to draw down oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve and to participate in the international energy agreement will expire on September 30 of this year.

My amendment incorporates the exact language we agreed to last fall between House and Senate conferees on H.R. 4, the comprehensive energy bill. The amendment permanently authorizes the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. It also requires filling the Reserve to 700 million or its current capacity.

While I prefer to move this legislation through the Energy Committee, I cannot guarantee we would complete our work and get this legislation to the President before September 30. Therefore, I believe the prudent thing for the Senate to do is to add this language to the omnibus appropriations bill and deal with this matter now.

Again, I see this as a bipartisan issue, one that the administration supports, one that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle support. I hope very much this amendment, as well, can be added to the bill without objection by any Senator.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

FAMINE RELIEF FOR AFRICA

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I take a couple of moments to inform the Senate what I will be doing later. Yesterday, this freshman Senator from Florida brought forth an