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Senate

The Senate met at 1 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's prayer will be offered by our guest Chaplain, Rev. Charles V. Antonicelli, St. Joseph's Church on Capitol Hill, Washington, DC.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray. Almighty God, source of all power and goodness, we give You thanks and praise this day for the many blessings You bestow on our country. Help us to be a beacon of hope and freedom to all nations.

Lord, look kindly on the Members of this august body. Give them wisdom and compassion, patience and endurance, so that they may meet the needs of Your people with justice and truth. Give them a sense of humble reverence for You and a sense of loving service to the people they have been elected to represent. Strengthen them with fortitude to make difficult decisions and courage to carry them through.

Dear God, bless these Senators in their deliberations this day. Keep them always from harm and watch over the people whom they serve. Help them to be a sign of Your care and protection to us always.

We ask this in Your holy name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable TED STEVENS 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a

period for the transaction of morning business not to extend beyond the hour of 2 p.m., with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, there will be a period for morning business until 2 p.m. At that time, the Senate will begin consideration of S. Con. Res. 23, the budget resolution. By statute, there will be 50 hours of debate. So Senators should expect late nights and numerous votes throughout this week.

As previously announced, there will be no votes today. However, it is the leader's intention to complete action on this matter of the budget this week.

There will be a cloture vote on Mr. Estrada's nomination tomorrow. Senators will be notified as to the precise time of that vote as soon as the majority leader and minority leader have consulted.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CORNYN). The Senator from Iowa.

CELEBRATE AMERICAN AGRICULTURE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, we have an opportunity this week, as we do every year, to celebrate American agriculture. This is the week we traditionally recognize. It is called National Agriculture Week.

Ask any friend or neighbor what is eating them and you are likely to get an earful about rising gas prices, military action in Iraq, the high cost of health care, prescription drugs, or the downturn in the U.S. economy.

In my most recent town meetings, I listened to Iowans express anxiety about job security, retirement security, health care security, energy secu-

rity, national security, and homeland security. But never once did I have a single person in my State list as one of their concerns the concern of food security. That is because we in the United States are blessed with a rich agricultural bounty to provide more than enough food to feed U.S. consumers and a growing world population. American farmers are the most productive food producers in the world and, as a result, each American farmer can feed more than 120 people at home and abroad.

That is reason enough to give Americans an extra peace of mind. Yet I guess a majority of Americans take their food and how it got to their fork somewhat for granted. That is, in fact, a shame.

American agriculture serves an instrumental role in the life of every American. As George W. Bush has noted:

A nation that can feed its people is a nation more secure.

Beyond the benefits to national security, American agriculture also anchors the economy because the production of food and fiber from the farm to the consumer represents one-fifth of the U.S. economic pie. It props up our balance of trade. Agricultural exports exceed \$1 billion per week. It creates jobs. Twenty percent of America's workforce is employed in the food chain from production to processing, marketing, and retailing. It saves the American consumer money because each American consumer spends only 9 percent of their income on food, the lowest percentage in the world.

Every year in March those of us with interests in agriculture join forces to celebrate National Agriculture Week and spread the word about agriculture's affordable, high-quality abundance and its social, economic, and environmental influences on America.

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



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Located in the heart of America's breadbasket, Iowa's agricultural heritage goes back many generations. Iowans appreciate how significant our food system is, not only to basic human existence, but to the State's economy and also to our way of life.

As the leading producer of corn, soybeans, hogs, and eggs in America, Iowa's high-quality agricultural bounty would make George Washington proud. The farmer and our first President, George Washington, once said:

Agriculture is the most healthful, most useful, and most noble employment to man.

At the turn of the 21st century, Iowa is working to stay on the leading edge of the research and use its bounty to benefit biotechnology and advances in life science. Whether growing crops for pharmaceutical use or raising cattle capable of producing proteins that can be used for human drug therapies, Iowa has significant potential to create good, high-paying jobs and reap economic benefits in ways unimaginable at the turn of the last century when the production of food was all that was on farmers' minds.

With several farmer-owned ethanol plants up and running, Iowa also is fueling local economic activity and helping to increase our energy independence by turning home-grown corn into ethanol, lessening our dependence upon a foreign source such as Iraq, for instance.

As a life-long family farmer, I take advantage of every opportunity in Washington, DC, in Congress, like now in this Senate Chamber, to serve as a farmer's advocate because I want to make sure that family farmers' voices are heard at the policy tables in Washington. Notwithstanding the need to keep our food production and supply system safe from sabotage, Americans are blessed to live in a Nation where food security does not mean wondering if there is enough food available to feed one's family every day.

National Agriculture Week, March 16 to 22, is a good opportunity to showcase American agriculture and to give thanks to those who work hard to get high quality, affordable food from the farm to our table. I hope every one of those people living in urban America who might think that food grows in super markets rather than on farms would give a thought to the usefulness of the family farm and what it contributes to the quality of life of Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I first want to commend the Senator for his eloquent statement. I think it is always important to remind Americans, no matter where they live, of the productivity of American agriculture and the importance, particularly, of our family farmers. There is no one who is a greater advocate for America's farmers than the Senator from Iowa. So I am very pleased to have had the privilege of hearing his comments today.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of the legislation are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

POST-BALANCED BUDGET ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I want to discuss the upcoming budget resolution and its impact on home health agencies. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the Post-Balanced Budget Act reductions in home health care have totaled more than \$72 billion between fiscal years 1998 and 2002. This is more than four times the \$16 billion that CBO originally estimated for that time period and it is a clear indication that the Medicare home health cutbacks have been far deeper than Congress ever intended.

As a consequence of these reductions, cost-efficient home health agencies across the country have experienced acute financial difficulties and cashflow problems which have inhibited their ability to deliver vital care. Home health spending has been cut in half since 1997. More than 3,400 home health care agencies have either closed their doors or stopped serving Medicare patients. Moreover, the number of Medicare patients receiving home health care nationwide has dropped by 1.3 million, more than a third. This points out the most central and critical issue: Cuts of this magnitude simply cannot be sustained without ultimately affecting patient care, without ultimately diminishing the provision of care to some of the most vulnerable citizens in our Nation.

It, therefore, is my intent to offer an amendment to the budget resolution this week calling on the Senate to stabilize and promote fairness in Medicare home health reimbursements by avoiding further cuts in home health spending, preserving the full market basket update, and restoring funding for this important benefit, including the extension of the 10 percent rural add-on reimbursement I have discussed today. I hope all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this amendment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will make a few comments in morning business. I agree with the Senator from Maine. As cochairman of the Rural Health Caucus in the Senate, we have been working for a very long time and will continue to work for equity payments between urban and rural areas. In this instance, in-home health care costs are often higher in rural areas.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT REFORM

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I will talk a moment about an issue that has been important to Wyoming and to the entire country. As in many cases, the things we do here and the national

laws we pass have different effects in different places. Wyoming, being a rather large State, a rural State, is 50 percent owned by the Federal Government. When we talk about endangered species, the program works much differently than it does in Delaware. There needs to be a certain amount of flexibility, as is the case with many things we do.

I am for endangered species acts. It is proper we have programs that protect various endangered species, whether they be plants or animals. That should continue. However, we have been in this program now since about 1970 and there are, from our experience, changes we ought to consider. I am convinced this program needs some kind of change.

Unfortunately, the results we have had are not the kind of results we intended. There has been a large amount of listing of endangered species but very little recovery. Of course, the purpose, the bottom line, is intended to protect special species and to recover them so they are self-supporting. We are hopeful we can strengthen the program to some degree so we can emphasize the recovery rather than simply the listing. The listing has an impact, particularly where there are interspersed private and public lands. What is done in public lands affects those on private lands.

Because of the way lands were developed in the West with the Homestead Act, part of the lands were homesteaded and are now private. Those that were public are used by those folks with leases and they intermingle. It is an overlapping issue.

We have had several experiences in our State and particularly with the States surrounding Yellowstone Park—Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming—particularly with grizzly bears. Everyone recognizes the importance and wants to maintain the grizzly bear. They were developed in the park to refurbish them. We have long since, several years ago, surpassed the numbers in the plan for total recovery numbers, but they are still not de-listed; they are still listed and treated as endangered because we cannot come together on what the range ought to be. We cannot figure it out to get them de-listed.

The same thing is true with wolves. We have wolves that were there years ago and they left. The Park Service re-imported them from Canada and put them in Yellowstone Park. We knew they would not stay in Yellowstone Park and, of course, they did not. We have the same sort of problem with a predatory animal that is now in Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho, and it is managed as an endangered species. For people who have property at risk, sometimes even humans at risk, there is not much that can be done as long as these critters are endangered.

We seek to get a plan so they can be endangered in Yellowstone Park, but the States surrounding can have a plan to manage the animals so there is some