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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord our God, You are the fountain of all wisdom. We will praise Your mighty deeds and Your power to save. Teach us how to trust You completely, for You are our mighty protector. Help us to see that You know our hearts and plan to prosper us and to give us abundant life. Guide us along right paths, so that we depend upon Your providence and follow Your precepts. Make us a nation that acknowledges Your sovereignty and seeks You in all of life's seasons.

Today, strengthen the Members of this body. May people be attracted by the strength and beauty of their lives. Let those who watch their deliberations be impressed by their impartiality and by their desire to always do right. Empower them to administer the affairs of this Nation faithfully and wisely. We pray in Your strong Name. 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, today we are convening for this unusual Saturday session with the hope of finishing

our work and adjourning the 108th Congress. We anticipate the omnibus conference report will arrive from the House of Representatives today. In all likelihood that would be early to mid-afternoon. I hope we will be able to have a short period of debate and then proceed to a vote on adoption of that conference report.

Once the report arrives officially from the House of Representatives—again, I think it is going to be early to midafternoon, possibly around 2 o'clock—we would like to go to that bill at that point in time. As you can see before me, we have the copies, both here and each of the cloakrooms have several copies at this point in time. I know people have been interested and have been looking through the copies of that report. But we will be prepared to go to it this afternoon.

One of the issues we will be checking with also, over the course of the rest of the morning and early afternoon, is to ask Members how much time they do want to spend on debate and how much debate time will be necessary in order that we can advise our colleagues with regard to their schedules.

In addition, over the night—which was a long night for many people, both staff as well as Members, in bringing to a close the 108th Congress—there was a lot of work on the intelligence reform bill, the 9/11 intelligence reform bill. Huge progress has been made over the last 24 hours under the leadership, from the Senate side, of Senator COLLINS, joined by Senator LIEBERMAN and, indeed, they have done yeoman's work in bringing us to this point. So if that conference report becomes available, we may also be considering intelligence reform over the course of the day.

A third issue that we have spent a lot of time with yesterday and through last night and over the course of the morning is the nominations. People do not realize that in our calendar right now there are over 200 nominations

pending that we either need to wrap up today or it will be in the next Congress. It is not 10 or 20 or 50 or 100; it is almost 200 nominations that have been held up for various reasons. But they made it to the calendar and I am very hopeful that over the course of the next several hours we can reach an agreement to address all 200 or so of those pending nominations. Many people are working on that. I just encourage our Members to continue to work on that.

These individuals have accepted the call to public service in many different capacities. Yet because of inactivity on the floor of the Senate, they are going to be just a name in that book where if we can act on that, they will be allowed to proceed. They have gone through the entire process. I know it is incumbent upon us to act. We just have to find a way to confirm these non-controversial executive nominations before we finish our work.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

I want to comment on two things. First is a resolution we passed yesterday, last night, in support of democracy in the Middle East. On November 12, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of England articulated their joint resolve to press for a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Specifically, they support the creation of a Palestinian State that is peaceful, that is democratic, that is free, and that is based and grounded on the rule of law, that will include free press and free speech and an open political process and religious tolerance.

Last night, here in the Senate, we voted unanimously to ratify this vision. It is our hope that both parties to the roadmap will follow it to a peaceful resolution. With courage and determination on both sides, we believe, in fact we know, that peace can be achieved.

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



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