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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JOHN E. SUNUNU, a Senator from the State of New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Today's prayer will be offered by our guest Chaplain, Pastor Rickey Blythe, from the First Baptist Church of Flora, in Flora, MS.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Our Father in Heaven, Thou Who art loving, compassionate, merciful, patient, and gracious to forgive, we desire to acknowledge You in all our ways, that You may direct our steps. Especially do we need You in the great moments of life. Graciously regard these Your servants. We acknowledge that "righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." May we desire character more than reputation, truth more than expediency, and honesty more than vanity. Help us to be the good Samaritan ready to help all in need regardless of race, face, or place. We pray that we may learn the peace that comes with forgiving and the strength we gain in loving. Let righteousness, justice, and mercy be carried along on the current of Thy love, mercy, and truth.

The men and women of this august body of elected officials carry a tremendous responsibility, and the sense of that responsibility is with them every day. We ask on their behalf that You would strengthen each one as they faithfully serve this great Republic in which we live. It has been a long week for most, and still there is more work to do. Grant unto these our Senators that they may find joy in the task. As the unseen guest of all these proceedings, may You light their way. At the end of the day, grant that we may live not in despair but, rather, in a desire for a better America, which will be brought to fruition not by our words but by our deeds.

We ask it in the Name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JOHN E. SUNUNU 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. STEVENS).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, July 21, 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 E. SUNUNU, a Senator from the State of New Hampshire, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SUNUNU 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. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning, we will have 60 minutes of debate prior to the cloture vote on the nomination of Thomas Dorr to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development. This is a nomination we have tried to clear for quite some time but were unable to do so because of an

objection on the other side of the aisle. On Tuesday, I filed a cloture motion so we could bring this nomination to a vote. I do hope we can invoke cloture and subsequently vote affirmatively, with an up-or-down vote, on the President's nomination.

Once cloture is invoked and we are able to vote on the Dorr nomination—once we complete that—we will resume debate on the Defense authorization bill. Chairman WARNER and Senator LEVIN were on the Senate floor yesterday to consider amendments. There is one amendment pending at this point in time. I understand the other side is looking at that amendment. It is an amendment relating to armored personnel carriers. We will schedule that for a vote sometime early today, I hope.

We will be considering additional amendments over the course of today. We, of course, will be voting over the course of the afternoon on the Department of Defense authorization bill. We do need to make substantial progress on the bill this week. Therefore, we do ask Senators to come forward with their amendments.

75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, today marks the 75th anniversary of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

On July 21, 1930, by Executive order, President Herbert Hoover consolidated our veterans programs into a new Federal agency. In the decades since, the Department has grown to become the second largest Federal agency. In 1989, its director was elevated to a Cabinet-level position. Today, the agency serves more than 25 million American military veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs offers the most comprehensive veterans assistance programs of any country in the world. Since the very first

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



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settlers, America has provided for our veterans. Way back in 1636, the Pilgrims of Plymouth County agreed that members of the colony would support soldiers disabled in the battles with the Pequot Indians. One hundred forty years later, the Continental Congress moved to provide pensions for soldiers disabled by the War for Independence.

In the following decades, Congress enacted many more measures to support our retired service men and women. On June 22, 1944, Congress passed the GI bill, one of the most significant pieces of legislation in our country's history. Initially, the proposal to provide educational assistance to our vets was met with controversy. But after successful lobbying by the American Legion, the GI bill was passed unanimously in both Houses. It is now considered one of the most influential pieces of legislation enacted since the Homestead Act.

The GI bill has not only opened the door to higher education for millions of Americans, it has transformed America from a society of renters to a society of homeowners. It is the Veterans Affairs Department that has so successfully overseen this tremendous achievement.

An area of special interest to me is veterans health. Before coming to the Senate, I spent at least a portion of every week serving our veterans, through surgery, in the operating rooms in veterans hospitals, whether it was the veterans hospital in Nashville, TN, or when I was on the west coast. But literally every week, over the period of my entire professional career in medicine, I was serving veterans in a hospital, performing heart surgery and lung surgery and removing cancers from their chests.

The VA hospitals in particular have been successful in streamlining their health information technologies. As we reach out today, focusing on our overall health care system—our health care sector, I should say; we don't have a real health care system in this country—we are looking to the Veterans' Administration and their now over 20 years of experience of health information sharing throughout a system, hospital to hospital and hospital to physician's office.

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that for a discrete set of measures, VA patients were in better health and received more recommended treatments as compared to Medicare patients treated on a fee-for-service basis.

According to the VA's own medical professionals, a computer system called VISTA is the key to their success. Sanford Garfunkel, the director of the VA Medical Center in Washington, DC, says:

I'm proud of what we do here but it isn't that we have more resources. The difference is information.

I applaud the VA hospitals for their innovation and for their commitment. I had the opportunity, before coming to the Senate, to see it firsthand in the

patients I took care of in our VA hospitals. Each day, the physicians and nurses in these hospitals are advancing that mission of the Veterans Affairs agency to—in the words of Abraham Lincoln—"care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan."

It is in that spirit that I pledge to our Nation's veterans to pass legislation prior to the August recess to ensure that the veterans health care system has the resources necessary to care for those who have stood in harm's way for us.

Tonight, the VA Diamond Jubilee celebrations will be kicked off with an event at the DAR Constitution Hall here in Washington, DC. In the following weeks and months, our Nation's veterans, their families, and grateful communities will come together in celebrations all over the country to honor the deep contributions of our service men and women.

Thank you to the VA and to our women and men of the Armed Forces, including the new generation of veterans coming back from Afghanistan and Iraq. America owes you a great debt of gratitude, and we intend to—and will—continue that long and proud tradition of providing for our soldiers even after they have left the battlefield.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, another way to honor our veterans is to honor the men and women currently serving in our military. Yesterday, we did begin the Defense authorization bill. I do urge my colleagues to come to the Senate floor now, this morning, with their amendments. We must do so now in order to complete this bill. We will consider the legislation amendment by amendment, in an orderly way. It is my intention, in consultation with the bill manager, to file cloture on this bill in short order. That should send a strong signal that now is the time for people to come to the Chamber with their amendments.

I also plan to offer an amendment to the Defense authorization bill to preserve our longstanding relationship between the Department of Defense and the Boy Scouts of America. This legislation is necessary—it is unfortunate it is necessary, but it is necessary—to press back on the lawsuits that seek to sever the ties between our military, which has hosted the Boy Scout Jamboree on its bases, and the Boy Scouts of America.

America's youth can learn so much from the men and women in uniform today: love of country, commitment to values, sacrifice for others. It is simply wrongheaded to conclude that Pentagon support of the Boy Scouts of America violates the establishment clause. It is time to return some common sense to the courts.

On Monday, July 25, thousands of Scouts from all around the country

will begin arriving at Fort AP Hill. Let's protect that relationship. We have an opportunity to do so. It is time for us to act.

We will also be considering gun liability legislation before we leave. Given the profusion of litigation, the Department of Defense faces the very real prospect of outsourcing sidearms for our soldiers to foreign manufacturers. Let me repeat, given the amount, the profusion of litigation, the Department of Defense faces the real prospect of having to outsource sidearms for our soldiers to foreign manufacturers.

The Baretta Corporation, for instance, makes the standard sidearm for the U.S. Armed Forces. They have the long-term contracts to supply these pistols to our forces in Iraq. Recently, the company had this to say:

The decision of the D.C. Court of Appeals . . . has the likelihood of bankrupting, not only Baretta U.S.A., but every maker of semiautomatic pistols and rifles since 1991.

Without this legislation, it is possible the American manufacturers of legal firearms will be faced with the real prospect of going out of business, ending a critical source of supply for our Armed Forces, our police, and our citizens.

The legislation prohibits one narrow category of lawsuits: suits against the firearms industry for damages resulting from the criminal or unlawful misuse of a firearm or ammunition by a third party.

Over two dozen lawsuits have been filed on a variety of theories, all seeking the same politically motivated goal: putting our industry out of business. This is wrong.

These frivolous suits threaten a domestic industry that is critical to our national defense, jeopardize hundreds of thousands of jobs, and put at risk law-abiding citizens who have guns for recreational use.

Many support this legislation, including the Fraternal Order of Police. I am hopeful, with the cooperation of Members, we can complete all action on this legislation before the recess.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

NOMINATION OF THOMAS C. DORR TO BE UNDER SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session for the consideration of Calendar No. 101, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Thomas C. Dorr, of Iowa, to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Rural Development.