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## Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JON TESTER, a Senator from the State of Montana.

### PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, all things, all places, all people belong to You. You have promised that those who seek You will find You. Strengthen our faith to believe that You will be with us wherever the circumstances may lead. Continue to sustain the Members of this body as they confront challenges. Give them the wisdom to depend on You.

Heal wounded spirits, troubled consciences, and remove cares. Provide them with wisdom to perceive You, intelligence to understand You, and diligence to seek You. Replenish their physical strength when the days are long and give them resiliency for the difficult road ahead.

We ask this in the name of Him who supplies all our needs. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JON TESTER 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. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,  
Washington, DC, March 5, 2008.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable JON TESTER, a Senator from the State of Montana, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,  
President pro tempore.

Mr. TESTER 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. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican Leader, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for an hour, with the time divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the Consumer Product Safety Commission legislation.

Mr. President, I certainly complain when things do not go well here on the floor and we are unable to legislate. I think that what has transpired on the CPSC legislation is how we should legislate. I hope it continues that way. In that regard, it appears we have a piece of legislation—it is bipartisan in nature, it came out of the committee after much consternation. We were concerned that we could not get anything out of there. We finally did get something out of the committee. It looks like a very good piece of bipartisan legislation.

We are going to finish this bill this week. I hope we can finish it sooner rather than later. I alerted my caucus that we would be in session until we do finish the bill, but there is no reason we cannot finish this very quickly. I see no reason we have to move to clo-

ture. If that becomes necessary, I will certainly talk to the distinguished Republican leader. But I do not see that on the horizon at this stage.

I hope we can move forward on this legislation. I would comment on this: The managers of the bill are somewhat hesitant on an amendment. They did not know if we should vote on it. That was handled properly when the manager of the bill, Senator PRYOR, moved to table an amendment.

That is the way to go, not worry about people talking too much or, well, they are not going to let us vote on it. The manager of the bill has that prerogative when someone offers an amendment. They say their piece, they move to table. It is nondebatable. And we need to do that on this legislation and other pieces of legislation and not worry so much about a difficult vote.

So I hope we can move forward as we have and finish this legislation as quickly as possible.

### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to use my leader time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

### AMT IMPACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, last week our friends on the other side pulled the housing bill. But the problem the bill was meant to address obviously does not go away. The effects of the housing downturn continue to spread.

Yesterday the Fed Chairman called for a vigorous response from banks and

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



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from lenders. He said aggressive action by lenders would help stressed homeowners and help ensure the health and well being of the broader U.S. economy.

Well, we Republicans have been saying the same thing about Congress's response to the housing crisis for 2 weeks. The Democratic plan for stressed homeowners is to raise monthly mortgage payments on those who buy new homes or refinance existing ones. We have a different view on this side of the aisle. We want to expand the family budget, not the Federal budget, by helping homeowners with targeted assistance and homebuyer tax credits that will make the problem better, not worse. We have a concrete plan to foster the conditions that lead to more homeownership by protecting existing jobs, creating new jobs, increasing wages and keeping taxes low.

Among the things we can do to keep taxes low is to patch the loophole that threatens tens of millions of middle-class Americans with a giant AMT tax this year. There is no reason we cannot come together now and remove any doubt Americans have about paying a tax that threatens to cost them, on average, \$2,000 more in taxes this year.

We patch the AMT every year, and because it was never meant to hit middle-class taxpayers in the first place, we patch it without creating new taxes somewhere else. In the current economy, we should spare taxpayers the political theatre of waiting until the last minute to go through this annual charade.

Last night the Budget Chairman said the Democratic budget proposal this year will include an AMT patch without an accompanying tax hike. I think that is certainly good news. I commend him for that decision, and it is one more reason we should not put off passing the AMT fix. If this is what the chairman intends, we should follow through on it now to give taxpayers added certainty. We should remove the doubt about the AMT now so Americans who are worried about the economy have one less thing to be concerned about.

Last year a Democratic-led standoff over passing an AMT patch threatened to delay tax returns for 50 million taxpayers, totaling about \$75 billion in refunds. In this economy, we cannot afford to play these kinds of games. We know we will patch the AMT at some point this year. We should give some comfort to taxpayers by doing it now. It is time to put American families' budgets in front of the ever-expanding Federal budget.

Mr. President, I share the view of the majority leader that we are making good progress on the underlying bill, and hopefully that will continue today. I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I think it is important I respond to my distinguished counterpart. We did not pull

the bill. We were unable to go to the bill. We moved to proceed to the bill and had to file cloture. We could not get 60 votes because we had 1 Republican vote with us to move so we could legislate on housing.

As I have said so many times, if the Republicans were serious about legislating on housing, they would have moved to the bill. I pulled the bill? That is as Orwellian as this conversation could be. I did not pull the bill. I tried to go to the bill. Republicans would not let us go to the bill.

We have five simple things in our housing package that are extremely important to the housing industry. Transparency is JACK REED's provision that all of these agreements should be transparent, they should be understandable.

No. 2, the President asked, and we proceeded to do what he asked, to have revenue bonds to take care of some of the distressed properties. No. 3, we have large segments of—we were in a meeting that is still going on with faith leaders. The head of the Baptist Convention says in his neighborhoods, one, two, and three houses are going into foreclosure every week. They have neighborhoods that are in trouble.

We have CDBG grants in our bill to allow States to step in and take care of some of those troubled properties. We also have something that the homebuilders care about a great deal, and that is a loss carryforward. It is something they want that would be helpful to the economy, that would be helpful to the housing market.

Finally, we have a provision that says: If you have a home, you should be able to go to bankruptcy court and have the loan rate adjusted, just as you can if you have a vacation property that you need to have readjusted. Those are the five things, very simply.

But I say if my Republican colleagues think there is a housing crisis, let us legislate the housing crisis. Come here, offer amendments and deal with it.

But remember, they held a press conference on the same day, on the same day they stopped us from going forward on housing. What did they do in the press conference? Here is what they wanted to do to solve the problems of housing around our country: tort reform. Now, you can imagine what a laughter that is, tort reform to solve the housing crisis in America today.

Secondly, they want to lower taxes. Now try that one on. They are not serious about the housing crisis or they would allow us to move forward. No, we did not pull the housing bill; they would not let us go to the housing bill. That is the record. Vote No. 35, 110th Congress, cloture, motion to proceed, cloture motion was rejected because we did not get 60 votes.

So all we want are the facts. When you look at those nasty facts, it indicates the Republicans do not want to legislate on housing. They want, as the President suggested in his press con-

ference last week, to let us see what happens in June when the rebates come back.

This is not a wait-and-see, this is a problem we have to address immediately. What the President has done is voluntary in nature. It helps less than 3 percent of the homes in foreclosures now. Reports yesterday said it was basically worthless.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business for 1 hour with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

The Senator from Idaho.

#### THE BUDGET

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I wish to use my time by following up on the comments our leader has made with regard to the budget. It is budget time in Washington right now. Although many people are focused very heavily on the President's budget submission, the reality is that the budget is a uniquely legislative responsibility. The President makes a recommendation, but it is this Congress, the Senate and the House of Representatives, that establishes the budget for our Nation.

The budget that was announced yesterday and reviewed, which we will be evaluating in the Budget Committee today, in my opinion, is not responsible. In fact, it is an embarrassment.

We often talk about the fact that we want to avoid tax-and-spend politics in Washington. But this budget plunges headlong back into the very tax-and-spend policies of the past that have put us in the dire fiscal position we are in today.

The budget is a failure on the spending policy, it is a failure on the tax policy, and it is a failure on the additions to our national debt that are monumental, which it contemplates. It is a failure because it does not do a single thing about the most significant fiscal problems facing us, namely the entitlement problems and the entitlement portion of our budget.

Let me go through all those briefly. To do so, I am going to explain—this may be a little bit basic to those in the middle of budgeting, but I am not sure the folks who pay attention to those understand exactly how the budgeting process works.

This year we will have the first budget that exceeds \$3 trillion in Federal spending. In rough approximation, that budget is approximately two-thirds entitlements and spending on the interest on the national debt. The other remaining third is made up of what we call discretionary spending.

Again, approximately half of that is our national defense budget, and the