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Senate

The Senate met at 12:45 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable CLAIRE MCCASKILL, a Senator from the State of Missouri.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Almighty God, who has given us this good land for our heritage, help us to be a people mindful of Your favor and glad to do Your will. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion, from pride and arrogance and from every evil way.

Lord, defend our liberties and fashion us into one united people. Empower our Senators with the spirit of wisdom that justice and peace may reign. May they serve You with such faithfulness that America will show forth Your praise among the nations of the Earth. In times of prosperity, fill their hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble give them a robust faith in You. May they keep their attention on You as the only one they must please.

We pray in the Redeemer's Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CLAIRE MCCASKILL 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, April 17, 2008.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CLAIRE MCCASKILL, a Senator from the State of Missouri, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. MCCASKILL thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF THE FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT ACT OF 2002

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 5813.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will state the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5813) to amend Public Law 110-196 to provide for a temporary extension of programs authorized by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 beyond April 18, 2008.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read the third time and passed; that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table; that there be no intervening action or debate; and that any statements relating to this matter be printed in the RECORD.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 5813) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

Mr. REID. Madam President, this farm bill has been extended for a short period of time. The conferees have worked extremely hard. I hope we can get the conference report to us early next week. It would be a real disappointment if we didn't get this bill done.

WELCOMING POPE BENEDICT XVI TO THE UNITED STATES

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 519.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 519) welcoming Pope Benedict XVI to the United States and recognizing the unique insights his moral and spiritual reflections bring to the world stage.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 519) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

The resolution, with its preamble, reads as follows:

S. RES. 519

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI will travel to the United States for his first pastoral visit as Pope and will visit Washington, DC, and New York;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI was elected as the 265th Bishop of Rome on April 19, 2005, succeeding the much beloved Pope John Paul II;

Whereas the visit of Pope Benedict XVI will mark the 9th visit of a pope to the United States, recognizing the historical importance of the Catholic Church in American

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



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life, the deep faith and charity of its members, and the responsibilities of the United States in world affairs;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI has spoken approvingly of the vibrance of religious faith in the United States, a faith nourished by a constitutional commitment to religious liberty;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI remains committed to ecumenical dialogue and, during his trip to the United States, will meet with leaders of world religions and representatives of other Christian denominations and will visit a synagogue in New York City, all demonstrating his commitment to sincere dialogue and unity among all members of the human family;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI has authored 2 encyclical letters inviting the world to meditate on the virtues of love and hope, "Deus caritas est" and "Spe salvi";

Whereas millions of Americans have discovered in Pope Benedict's words a renewed faith in the power of hope over despair and love over hate;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI has been a clear and courageous voice for the voiceless, working tirelessly for the recognition of human dignity and religious freedom across the globe;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI has spoken out for the weak and vulnerable;

Whereas Pope Benedict XVI seeks to advance a "civilization of love" across our world; and

Whereas Catholics in parishes and schools across the Nation, and countless other Americans as well, eagerly await the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate welcomes Pope Benedict XVI on the occasion of his first pastoral visit to the United States and recognizes the unique insights his moral and spiritual reflections bring to the world stage.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Madam President, we are going to resume consideration of the highway bill very soon. Yesterday, we filed cloture on the Boxer substitute amendment to the underlying bill.

Under the rule, Senators have until 1 p.m. today to file first-degree amendments. Senator MCCONNELL and I are going to have a consent agreement that we will present to the Senate in the immediate future.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

HIGHWAY TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS ACT OF 2007

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1195, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1195) to amend the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users, to make technical corrections, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Boxer amendment No. 4146, in the nature of a substitute.

Coburn amendment No. 4538 (to amendment No. 4146), to create a bipartisan, bicameral special committee to investigate the improper insertion of an earmark for Coconut Road into the conference report of the 2005 highway bill after both Chambers of Congress had approved identical versions of the conference report.

Boxer amendment No. 4539 (to the text of the committee substitute to be inserted), to call for a review by the Department of Justice of allegations of violations of Federal criminal law.

Coburn amendment No. 4540 (to amendment No. 4539), relative to the Coconut Road Investigation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 10 minutes in morning business.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I wanted to have a minute before to explain the lay of the land.

Mr. CRAIG. I yield to the chairman and leader of the bill.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, for the interest of all Members, we have been working now since Monday to pass a technical corrections bill, which, it seems to me, should have been passed very quickly. It basically makes some corrections to the last big highway and transit bill so certain projects that have been held up for technical reasons can go forward, and others that weren't ready, pushed aside, and another can go forward. This will unleash about a billion dollars' worth of important programs for our Nation.

These projects have been vetted, and they have been posted on the Web page of the committee, as we must do according to our new ethics rules. We are very pleased it looks like we might be able to wrap this up in the next few hours.

As far as I am concerned, we are ready to vote. We have the Coburn amendment and the Boxer amendment, which deal with a real problem that occurred at some point during the SAFETEA-LU consideration years ago. We have corrected the problem in the bill. We want to now have some type of investigation to find out exactly what went wrong and if there were any crimes committed. There were two options. Senator COBURN is setting up a complicated select committee of the House and Senate. We believe strongly that it creates constitutional problems, and we think it might interfere with a Justice Department investigation.

And then Senator REID had recommended, I think a far better way to get at the problem, which is a Justice Department investigation. I have written an amendment to go along with that. We are hoping to vote on that and then, hopefully, get to a cloture vote and final passage.

So that is the lay of the land, as best I see it. I wish I had more control over this at the moment. If I did, we would be voting in 5 minutes on the whole

package. Until then, I will see you as soon as we have an agreement and, hopefully, we will get this matter done today.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Idaho is recognized.

EXTENSION OF THE FARM BILL

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I am on the floor to speak about something the majority leader proposed and that we have accepted by unanimous consent; that is, a 1-week extension of existing farm policy, the existing farm bill.

I come to the floor to speak because last night I put a hold on that UC request. I, similar to many Senators—and especially American agriculture—I am growing very frustrated and restless about the reality that we don't have a farm bill. As we know, across America and in central parts of our country—certainly in the South—spring is here and it is planting season. The farm bill that is current law, which we extended a few moments ago, actually expired on September 30 of 2007.

It was in July 2007 that the House passed their version, and on December 14 we passed ours. Now, we have offered several extensions so the principals—the House and Senate Ag committees—could work on their differences with the administration and solve these problems. Yet they have not been able to do it.

Is this symbolic of a dysfunctional Congress that we have been experiencing for the last several years, where we simply cannot grapple with the big and responsible basic public policy issues of our country? It appears to be that way. I will blame both sides on this issue. It is both sides that are at fault that they cannot come together and, if you will, split the difference and solve a problem that is the basic public policy for American agriculture. NANCY PELOSI, the Speaker of the House, opposes the tax provision within the bill. Why? She isn't a member of the Finance Committee or a member of the Agriculture Committee. Yes, she is the majority leader and, therefore, if she opposes it, she could certainly block it, and she can kill farm policy.

I have worked with Senator HARKIN and Senator SAXBY CHAMBLISS for the last month, and I know they have worked overtime. This is not a criticism of our colleagues; it is a criticism of a dysfunctional system that no longer can cut a deal and make basic and important public policy. So here we are, with one more extension. SAXBY CHAMBLISS called me this morning and said: LARRY, would you give us another week? I said I would give them 1 more week, but, frankly, this is it; I will not accept another extension next week on the farm bill, unless the deal has been cut, unless the agreement has been made and it is simply the procedure of putting it in writing and getting it to print and to the President.