

### RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

### DAUNTING CHALLENGES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I welcome my good friend the majority leader back to Washington. I hope he is renewed after the August break.

These past several weeks have been extremely instructive for me, as I am sure they were for a lot of the rest of our colleagues. I talked to a lot of Kentuckians, and not a single one suggested that I come back to Washington and do nothing until the November election.

America faces a number of daunting challenges. Very few of them were unknown to us when we all showed up here in January of 2007. Very few of them have been addressed, but there is still time to do significant work in the next weeks. I am still hopeful that we will.

We can protect millions of Americans from the alternative minimum tax and extend a host of expired and expiring tax incentives, including the renewable energy tax credits that drive much needed investment in alternative energy sources such as solar and wind. We should come together and agree to a long-term extension of these important tax incentives before the end of this year.

So far, Congress has been unable to come together on a comprehensive solution to our Nation's energy crisis. But the book hasn't closed yet on the 110th Congress. There is still time to act on this issue. And we should. We must work to provide much needed relief for Americans across the country who are struggling with the high price of gas at the pump. Congress can still show that we are responsive to the needs of the American people by doing something about the crisis now.

Some might disagree. One Senator on the other side recently said that he thinks frustration over the high price of gas has "peaked." But I have seen no evidence of this whatsoever in my State. In fact, I am confident, after spending the past month away from Washington, that if we did little else these next few weeks but pass a serious response to high gas prices, fund the Government, and protect taxpayers, the American people would view these next few weeks as extremely productive.

Americans want us to act to increase offshore exploration. There is nothing to fear in this. We can and should increase domestic energy exploration, even as we encourage the use of alternative energy sources and new conservation measures. There is no good reason we cannot all get behind a balanced approach that would allow us to find more and use less at the same time.

We also need to do our basic duty of funding the Government by passing appropriations bills. Over the last 25 years, no other Congress has failed to pass a single appropriations bill this late in the year. Even the infamous do-nothing Congress of 1948 had passed more than a dozen appropriations bills at this point on the legislative calendar. This is certainly not a record to be proud of. But it is not a record that has to stand. We still have time to change course. And we should.

While at war, we have yet to fund the troops, homeland security, and critical domestic programs. We have yet to fund veterans hospitals, education, transportation, and national parks. These are the basics. We should take them on. The upcoming election is no excuse to put off our responsibilities for another day. Americans have held a regularly scheduled election every 2 years for more than two centuries. The work of Government must go on regardless of how strong the partisan currents flow. It always has, and this year should be no exception.

We still have a few more weeks to do right by the American people. Let's not just mark time. Let's make a difference and do something constructive to help the American people in a difficult economic time. Let's put political games aside for a few weeks and do what is expected of us. This is not too much to ask, and I, for one, remain hopeful that we can rise to the occasion.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The senior Senator from Virginia is recognized.

### DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I wonder if I might pose a question to the leadership. Senator LEVIN and I just met in preparation to move forward, hopefully, on the annual authorization bill. This would be the 30th bill Senator LEVIN and I have worked on together. In the interim period, over the summer, our staffs have done a lot of very valuable work in terms of trying to sort through reconciliation between the House and Senate provisions. But it is our recommendation to the leadership that we try to obtain a UC to enable the amendments that would be brought forward to be relevant to the work of the committee, or the text of the bill.

I am just wondering, what do the respective leaders have to guide the Senator and myself on this issue?

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I say to the Senator from Virginia that I hope we can work out something. We have this week to do it. It will be the last week that we have an opportunity to finish this most important piece of legislation. I think we owe it to our troops to work out something. We can get hung up on germane and relevant. One thing we could do—and I know we have had a problem here with people wanting to

offer amendments on everything, as they have said, "like we used to do in the Senate."

Mr. President, I have been through a number of Presidential elections, and we have one coming up in about 60 days. We have to do things a little differently. I hope we can come up with some way to move forward on that. One of the suggestions made is maybe we could come up with something where the Senator from Virginia and Senator LEVIN can look at the amendments first related to the bill. We need to finish the Defense bill. Next week, we are going to be able to legislate our hearts out on energy. People have been wanting to do that for a long time. Let's get rid of this piece of legislation, which is important. I hope we can figure out a way to move forward on it.

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Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we talked about this a couple of times before the August break. I know he is concerned because this bill has frequently been targeted for nongermane amendments. I can recall that, as recently as last year, a nongermane amendment was offered by a member of the majority and actually adopted and became a complication in trying to complete the legislation.

I say to the Senator from Virginia, I don't know what is possible. I just got in from the airport. I will meet with the Republican leadership later this afternoon to discuss with our colleagues what we might be able to achieve. I am certainly open to trying to move the measure along. I will consult with everybody on our side to see whether that is possible.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the leaders. I only say that Senator LEVIN and I are ready, beginning tomorrow morning, if this procedural motion this afternoon at 5:30 is carried, to go to work. Hopefully, we can waive any 30-hour requirement, or whatever might be attached to this, and proceed directly to the bill. We both have amendments that can be brought up, and we welcome amendments from our colleagues. Again, the issue of relevancy is imperative if we hope to complete this bill this week.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I hope we don't have to use the 30 hours. We can start working on this tomorrow. There are amendments, as the Senator has indicated, members of the committee want to offer which relate to the bill. We should do that. Now, I hope we don't have to file cloture on the bill itself if we get on it. I think we should try to finish the Defense bill.

As I have indicated, I went to Afghanistan. We have learned a lot, and we are implementing what we learned in Iraq. There are some things in Iraq that didn't do so well. We are trying to do better in Afghanistan. But it takes resources, and that is what this bill is about. I hope we don't have to wait 30 hours. We don't have to do that.