



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 155

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2009

No. 50

Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable MARK BEGICH, a Senator from the State of Alaska.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the source of our strength, and the King above all gods, thank You for Your presence that sustains us throughout our days. Lord, let that presence guide our Senators in every situation and place. Make them instruments of Your peace and love, as they serve You by serving our Nation. Look with favor upon their efforts to meet the daunting needs of our times and to leave a legacy of excellence and integrity. Bless also the members of their staffs. Lord, each one has distinctive needs that only You can meet. In those matters that unsettle them, give them wisdom, grace, and power. We pray in Your loving name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable MARK BEGICH 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 24, 2009.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, section 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MARK BEGICH, a Sen-

ator from the State of Alaska, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. BEGICH 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 leader remarks, we will proceed to a period of morning business for up to 1 hour. The Republicans will control the first half; the majority will control the second. Senators will be permitted during that time to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

Following morning business, the Senate will resume the postcloture debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 1388, the national service reform legislation.

The Senate will recess from 12:30 to 2:15 for the weekly caucus luncheons.

As I announced yesterday, we have to finish the national service legislation this week, because we have to be on the budget next week. For those of us who have been in the Senate for a while, frankly, the budget is kind of an ugly thing. We have no rules, other than that the time for debate is limited. But at the end, it is a free-for-all where we can offer amendments, and there is no limitation to them. We have to finish that legislation before we take the Easter recess.

As I told everyone yesterday, we have to finish this bill today. I hope we can start legislating early today. I spoke to the managers of the bill yesterday, Senator MIKULSKI and Senator ENZI, who was held up in a snowstorm. I talked to Senator MIKULSKI and she thought the bill could be finished in 1 day. I hope those who are wanting to

use this time would allow us to start this legislation so that we can offer some amendments today and finish it in a reasonable time. I hope we don't have to work into the weekend. There are important things people have scheduled.

This is our last weekend prior to the Easter recess. I hope we can have thoughtful cooperation. If there are amendments, offer them, but let's complete this as quickly as possible.

RECOGNITION OF THE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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

THE BUDGET

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, a lot of people are still justifiably upset that executives at bailed-out businesses received multimillion-dollar bonuses compliments of the American taxpayer. The Senate will continue to press the question of how to make sure this doesn't ever happen again. But already there are some clear lessons we can draw from this experience. Perhaps the most important one is this: If we can't keep track of \$165 million, then it is going to be even harder to keep track of a trillion dollar stimulus bill, and it is going to be even harder still to keep track of the \$3.6 trillion that the administration is proposing in this budget we will be voting on next week.

Americans have already heard enough about this budget to know that it taxes too much. That verdict was validated by an unexpected source last week, when the President's own Transportation Secretary, Secretary LaHood, said he doesn't think it is a good idea to raise taxes in a recession.

Americans know this budget spends too much, that the spending figures are simply staggering, and that much of the spending is borrowed money. They

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



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know what this, in the end, means. It means that in the middle of a recession, when most Americans are rushing to pay down their credit cards, this budget does the exact opposite; it runs up the national credit card to an extent that we have never seen in our Nation's history. That is the point about this budget that I want to talk on this morning—that it simply borrows far too much.

In all the uproar about bonuses, some people may have forgotten about the budget. But with a vote on this funding blueprint fast approaching, it is time to refocus and review where we are.

A few weeks ago, with the Nation still reeling from the size of a trillion dollar stimulus bill, the administration unveiled a budget that made the stimulus bill look like pocket change. In the midst of a recession, the administration proposed a budget that involved major changes to education, health care, and energy. To pay for it all, they proposed the largest tax hike in history and a new national energy tax that hits everybody who turns on a light bulb.

Yet, even with these tax hikes, we still wouldn't be able to pay for all these changes—not even close. A few days ago, we learned that the amount of money we would have to borrow to enact these policies in the midst of a severe economic downturn is even greater than we thought.

According to an analysis by the Congressional Budget Office, the administration's projections were extremely optimistic. The CBO said that based on its projections, the budget would increase the deficit by \$2.3 trillion more over 10 years than the administration initially claimed. Now, keep in mind that the total deficit from last year was \$459 billion, a record-high figure at the time that only a few months ago everybody agreed was entirely too high for comfort. What we heard from the CBO is that the discrepancy between the administration's budget estimates and the CBO estimates of a deficit over 10 years was more than 4 times the previous record annual budget deficit.

So the administration is asking us to borrow an astonishing amount of money—so much so, in fact, that if we were to pass this budget as it is, the Federal Government, in only 4 years, will have to spend \$1 out of every \$8 it receives in tax dollars to make interest payments on the debt. It would be as if every worker in America spent the first hour of the workday, every day of the week, working to pay off the finance charge on his or her credit card. Of course, as debt piles up, it only becomes harder to pay down. Under this budget, the debt piles up even more quickly than it has piled up in recent months as a result of all of the spending and all of the bailouts.

As the recession took hold, it took 13 months for the Nation's gross debt to rise from \$9 trillion to \$10 trillion. It took less than half that time under this administration for the debt to

reach the \$11 trillion mark. The Nation's debt is at its highest level ever, and it is growing larger and larger. Under the administration's budget, the amount of public debt will double in 5 years and triple in 10 years.

It used to be that our friends on the other side cared quite a bit about the consequences of debt. All this debt is real, and it will have very real and disturbing consequences for our children and our grandchildren. Americans are worried about it, and the CBO report makes them even more worried.

Yet even more worrisome is the fact that so many of our friends on the other side seem completely unfazed by the CBO report that projects oceans of debt as far as the eye can see. I noticed that the Speaker of the House was quoted yesterday, saying that the CBO report wasn't reason to rethink any of the administration's budget priorities. Regardless of the CBO report, she said, "our priorities are the same."

The CBO report should have been a wake-up call to Congress. Instead, it is being viewed by some as a mere inconvenience—a distraction from the political goals of those in power. Well, I suggest that if we have learned one thing over the past several months, it is that economic dangers need to be addressed early. In the midst of an economic crisis that could have been averted, Americans expect more from their elected leaders.

This budget borrows too much. Americans are saying so. Congress should listen to those warnings now before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to a period of morning business for up to 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein 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 second half.

The Senator from Tennessee is recognized.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, would the Chair inform me when I have 1 minute?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Yes.

THE BUDGET

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I will comment on the Republican leader's remarks. I agree with him that this budget borrows too much. We say that publicly on the floor and we say

that privately in our discussions. Many of us are afraid that this 10-year budget is a blueprint for our country that our children and grandchildren simply cannot afford.

First, I will say a word about the President's press conference this evening. I hope that during his press conference, the President will reject the bill passed by the House of Representatives last week about the AIG bonuses as not the kind of thoughtful and mature response that the American people deserve from Congress in a time of crisis. It is certainly not worthy of approval from the President of the United States.

I hope the President will focus attention on something that is a mature and thoughtful response and is worthy of the attention of the President of the United States, and that is Secretary Geithner's proposal yesterday to use a partnership of public and private resources to begin to get the toxic assets out of banks, fix the banks, and get credit flowing again.

I voted last October and then again on January 15 to give, first, President Bush and, next, President Obama the money he needed to fix the banks. I could say, at this point, the proposal of the Secretary yesterday at first blush seems to me to be underfunded, undercapitalized by tax dollars and too late. But it is more important to say I believe it appears to be on exactly the right track, that it appears to be well thought out, and that at first blush it seems to be attracting support from the private sector, which it needs to do to be successful.

History shows us some lessons about when we have bank problems—and we have had plenty of them. When I was Governor of Tennessee in the 1980s, dozens of banks failed because of a problem with the Butcher brothers, who were basically kiting banks. But the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation came in and over the weekend usually recapitalized the banks, got rid of the bad assets, put them back out there, and our economy grew again. That is harder to do today because the businesses are bigger and the crisis is much larger. But the fundamental solution to our economic troubles is the same.

We need to fix the banks and get credit flowing again, and the way to fix the banks is to get enough of the toxic assets out so they can have confidence to lend money, and business can start growing, and people can get jobs again. That is the history lesson.

There is another history lesson, and that is that we need the President of the United States to focus his full attention on fixing the banks and getting credit flowing again. I have used the example of President Eisenhower going to Korea. Someone said to me: Senator ALEXANDER, no one pays attention to history. Well, they ought to.

President Eisenhower said in October of 1952: I shall go to Korea to fix the Korean war. That was in October. He