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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JEFF MERKLEY, a Senator from the State of Oregon.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Gracious God, through the power of Your spirit, empower us to live vibrant lives that glorify You. Awaken our lawmakers to the opportunities all around them. Help them to hear Your call to move forward and to accomplish the things that honor You, as You guide them in the pursuit of wisdom and truth. May they confidently face their duties, knowing that You are their sufficient shield and defense.

Lord, make them willing to listen, even to people with whom they expect to differ, united by the desire to represent You with exemplary conduct.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JEFF MERKLEY 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, December 11, 2009.

To the Senate:

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

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MERKLEY thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

NOTICE

If the 111th Congress, 1st Session, adjourns sine die on or before December 23, 2009, a final issue of the *Congressional Record* for the 111th Congress, 1st Session, will be published on Thursday, December 31, 2009, to permit Members to insert statements.

All material for insertion must be signed by the Member and delivered to the respective offices of the Official Reporters of Debates (Room HT-59 or S-123 of the Capitol), Monday through Friday, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. through Wednesday, December 30. The final issue will be dated Thursday, December 31, 2009, and will be delivered on Monday, January 4, 2010.

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By order of the Joint Committee on Printing.

CHARLES E. SCHUMER, *Chairman*.

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



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RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business. Senators will be permitted to speak for 10 minutes each during that period. Republicans will control the first 30 minutes, and the majority will control the next 30 minutes. We will continue work on an agreement to vote in relation to the drug reimportation matter, the Crapo motion to commit, and the side-by-side to the Crapo motion. These amendments and the motion are with respect to H.R. 3590, the health insurance reform legislation.

Yesterday, we filed cloture on the bill we got from the House, the appropriations bill, H.R. 3288, which includes Commerce-Justice-Science, Military Construction, Labor-HHS, Transportation, financial services, State and Foreign Operations. We are going to have at least two rollcall votes on motions to waive with respect to the appropriations conference report today. Senators will be notified when these votes are scheduled.

I direct this question through the Chair to my friend from South Dakota. I offered a unanimous consent request yesterday evening that set up a schedule of votes on the Crapo motion and, of course, the Dorgan amendment. Last night, I was told the Republicans were not ready yet. I ask my friend, are the Republicans ready to vote?

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the Republican leader has just arrived. I reserve any statement for him.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

HEALTH CARE AND THE OMNIBUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, Republicans are fully engaged in the health care debate. It is our view that there is no more important work we can do here than to show Americans what the Democratic plan for health care would mean to them. Once we return to the debate, Republicans will be

ready with two important amendments.

One of those amendments, by Senator CRAPO, would enable the President to keep one of the pledges he made as a candidate and as President about what the Democratic plan for health care reform would look like. He said that no family making less than \$250,000 a year and no individual making less than \$200,000 a year would see a tax increase of any kind. The Crapo motion would ensure that promise is kept.

An amendment by Senators HUTCHISON and THUNE would ensure that none of the taxes imposed by this bill would go into effect a day earlier than the benefits. In other words, you don't get taxes before you get benefits. This is a commonsense amendment. You certainly wouldn't ask someone to pay for the mortgage on a house 4 years before they were allowed to move in. In the same way, we should not tax people for a benefit they don't get for 4 long years.

The Hutchison-Thune amendment also aims to keep government honest, because most Americans have a hard time believing Washington would collect taxes on one thing for 4 years and actually have the discipline not to use the money on something else. This amendment would guard against that.

For the moment, the majority has decided to take us off health care. It has moved to an Omnibus appropriations bill that has all the hallmarks of all the other bloated spending bills we have seen this year. It is really outrageous, actually. At a time of double-digit unemployment, at a time when Democrats are talking about increasing by nearly \$2 trillion the amount of money the government is legally allowed to borrow, the majority has moved us off of one \$2.5 trillion spending bill and on to a 1,000-page omnibus that would cost the American taxpayer another \$½ trillion right in the middle of a recession.

Once again, the majority has shown a lack of restraint when it comes to spending. At a moment of record debt, at a moment when inflation is nearly flat, this bill represents a 12-percent annual increase in government spending. Let me say that again. Inflation is flat. Yet we are increasing discretionary spending by 12 percent in this omnibus spending bill. The American people are not increasing their spending 12 percent. Moreover, it includes a number of controversial, unrelated provisions, including, among other things, language to weaken restrictions on abortion funding.

This \$½ trillion spending bill spends \$50 billion more than last year. All this spending comes right on the heels of a new report from Treasury that says the government ran a deficit of nearly \$300 billion in October and November—the worst deficit we have ever had at this point in a fiscal year, ever. At a time when families across the country are struggling to make ends meet, law-

makers almost seem to be flouting their ability to spend taxpayer money. This bill contains many worthy projects. Unfortunately, the majority has piled on so much spending, so much debt and new controversial policies that I certainly can't support it.

As you may know, the Senate is considering a bill that would make basic changes in the country's health care system. We have been debating it for weeks. What I keep hearing on the other side is no reference to what the American people think. I hear these arguments about making history. Ignoring the public is not a great way to make history. We have not seen poll data for months that indicate the American people support the Reid bill. The most devastating one came out last night. A CNN opinion research poll taken December 2 and 3, this week—not exactly a bastion of conservatism—indicates that 61 percent of the American people oppose this health care bill and only 36 percent favor it.

We are looking for one courageous Member of the other side of the aisle—just one—to stand up and say he or she will not ignore the overwhelming opinion of the American people, he or she will not be so arrogant as to assume we have the right answer here and 61 percent of the American people somehow don't know what they are talking about.

The American people are pretty smart. They have been watching this carefully. This health care bill, like no other issue, affects every single American regardless of age. Everybody is interested in the subject. They have watched the debate closely. They are telling us: Please, Congress, please do not pass this bill.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes and the majority controlling the next 30 minutes.

The Senator from Texas.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, as I understand it, we are now in the 30-minute timeframe for the Republicans; is that correct?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that we be allowed to have a colloquy so we can go back and forth.