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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m., and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Our prayer this morning will be led by Commissioner Robert A. Watson, of the Salvation Army.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Commissioner Robert A. Watson, the Salvation Army, Alexandria, VA, offered the following prayer:

Sovereign Lord, we thank You for this day, the day You have made. We will be glad and rejoice in it. We acknowledge You as omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, and the only proper object of religious worship. How privileged we are, Father, to live in America. We thank You for those of earlier generations who sacrificed so much, making possible the freedoms we enjoy. Help us not to take for granted the benefits of our society, and to happily share our blessings with those around us. We thank You for the gifts of experience, intellect, and talent with which the Members of this legislative body are endowed. As they deal with the complex issues which are so important to the people of our Nation, please grant them wisdom, compassion, sound judgment, and the satisfaction of having served well. And now, as we enjoy again the beauty of a Washington springtime, help us to allow each sign of new life to remind us that You are the giver and sustainer of life, and to use Your gift wisely and well. In Your majestic name we pray. Amen.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, on behalf of the majority leader, I announce that it is hoped that the Senate will shortly enter into a consent agreement, which would allow for consideration of the resolution relating to the decertification of Mexico. If that agreement is reached, the Senate would be expected to begin consideration of the resolution this morning, possibly as early as 10 o'clock. Rollcall votes are expected on the Mexico resolution, and all Members will be notified as to when those votes can be anticipated once we reach this agreement. It is also possible that the Senate will begin consideration of the nuclear waste legislation prior to the Easter adjournment. And, again, all Senators will be notified accordingly. I thank my colleagues for their attention.

(Mr. HAGEL assumed the chair.)

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I yield myself the time allotted to the majority leader under the standing order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine is recognized.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 482 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROBERTS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be allowed to speak for up to 15 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMS. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

WHATEVER BECAME OF THE TAXPAYERS' AGENDA?

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, in November 1994, the American voters sent a clear message to Washington that resulted in a watershed election and the first Republican Congress in 40 years. That message was to enact a taxpayers' agenda of balancing the budget, limiting the size and scope of Government, and returning tax dollars and power to the taxpayers.

Two years ago today, the House of Representatives was marking day 76 of its unprecedented 100-day effort to carry out the taxpayers' agenda reflected in the Contract With America. They kept their promise to the American people by bringing all 10 provisions of the contract up for a vote and passing almost all of them.

In 1996, despite an unprecedented assault by the media, hostile special interest groups, and the big tax and spenders in Washington, the Republican majorities in Congress were preserved, indeed, even increased here in the Senate. The voters once again sent the message that they wanted the taxpayers' agenda enacted, but they wanted Congress and the President to come together in completing the work started in the 104th Congress.

Yet somehow this message has been misinterpreted by a number of my Republican colleagues, who seem to have come away from the 1996 elections with the mistaken notion that the effort to pass the taxpayers' agenda should be stalled or delayed. What concerns me most is that some of the loudest calls for retreating from that agenda are coming from within our own party leadership. This is not the same Republican majority that arrived in Washington in January 1995, ready to create fundamental change in a government that had enslaved so many working families for so many years. It is like the ancient Vikings who sometimes burned their boats after arriving in a new land. We stepped onto the shore

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



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and claimed there was no turning back to the era of big Government and higher taxes. We were determined that Washington would never be the same once we passed the taxpayers' agenda into law.

Today, it appears some of my colleagues are wishing they had their boats back.

Mr. President, I have tremendous respect and admiration for my friend and colleague from Georgia, the Speaker of the House. As a freshman Member of the House in the 103d Congress, I worked with NEWT GINGRICH, TIM HUTCHINSON, and others in making the \$500-per-child tax credit the centerpiece of the Republican budget alternative in 1994. I was honored that Mr. GINGRICH included our tax cut in the Contract With America, creating a platform on which I ran and won election to the Senate.

That said, you can imagine how disappointed, and even a little saddened, I was to read his comments in the newspapers this week, when he was quoted as endorsing the suggestion that plans for a major tax cut be temporarily shelved.

With all due respect to the Speaker, such a retreat would be a horrible mistake.

Mr. President, it was 2 years ago this week that the Speaker wrote a commentary for the Wall Street Journal he titled "The Contract's Crown Jewel." The crown jewel in this case was our package of tax cuts around which our balanced budget legislation was crafted, and the Speaker was its most vocal supporter.

"The bill proposes fundamental change in the relationship between the American government and the American citizenry," wrote the Speaker, "and is the plainest assertion we have yet made of the key principle underlying the Contract With America.

"Simply put," he went on to say, "the bill says this: 'The American government's money does not belong to the American government. That money belongs to Americans, and it's time to give Americans some of their own money back.'"

Mr. President, I realize those words were written before the Government shutdowns, before the thrashing the Republicans took in the press, before the special interests waged a guerilla war of lies and distortions against us. Even so, those words were true in March 1995 and are no less true in March 1997. The only thing that has changed during these past 2 years is that courage has been supplanted by timidity and lions have turned into lambs.

It was disheartening to read in the Washington Times on Tuesday that popular radio host Michael Reagan, son of the former President, was denouncing his ties to the Republican Party. The Times quoted him as saying:

The Republican Party has forgotten grassroots America, they are not talking to grassroots America, not paying attention to

grassroots America. Until the Republican Party remembers it won the election and acts like a winner and not a loser, I find myself as an independent.

I wonder how many other Americans are feeling equally abandoned?

The Washington Post this week carried the comments of a senior Republican aide in the House who suggested we were, quote, "just drifting" on budget and tax issues because many Republican leaders were unwilling to stick their necks out." Well, that is how it feels here some days. Imagine how it must feel to the millions of American taxpayers who are outside the insulation of the Washington Beltway.

Two years ago, we promised them tax relief. Congress delivered, but our hard work fell victim to a Presidential veto. So the American people were denied the tax relief that we promised in 1995—enacted and passed in our legislation; vetoed by the President. They were again denied tax relief in 1996. And now, the leaders of our party—our majority party, the party of the taxpayers, of families, the working class—are suggesting that the American people will not get tax cuts this year, either. And I say to them, you ought to be ashamed.

Believe it or not, Mr. President, when I am back home in Minnesota, people do not stop me on the street to tell me how grateful they are we failed to enact the \$500-per-child tax credit, or how grateful they are we cut the capital gains tax, or that we were unable to enact estate tax relief. No, the Minnesotans who stop me are angry and they are disappointed, because when they ask, "Where are the tax cuts you promised?" They are really asking "when are you going to do what you were elected to do?"

The folks here in Washington seem to have forgotten there are two parts to every promise: the making, and the keeping. The politicians have never had a problem with the making, but they have a great deal to learn about the keeping. And Mr. President, this is one issue that all comes down to keeping promises.

To go back on our promises now would deprive average American taxpayers of the leadership they voted for in 1994 and 1996, and say we were wrong in staking our claim on the side of the taxpayers and against big government. More importantly, it will deprive us of our biggest and most important constituency—and that is the hard-working, middle-class voters who cannot pay for the high-priced lobbyists, who cannot afford to take time off from work or take a break from caring for their kids to fly out to Washington to lobby us on a moment's notice for more money from taxpayers.

Let us not forget the people we represent. Our constituents are not the Washington talking heads who chant and babble as if they can read the minds of the family farmers in Winona, MN, or the senior citizen working the

counter at the Brainerd hardware store. And our constituents are certainly not the big spenders who have used and abused the people's tax dollars for decades.

No, our constituents are the American taxpayers who sent us here to Washington to fight for them, because if we do not, who else will? If we do not stand beside them today, what reason do the taxpayers have to stand beside us, if all they will get in return are empty promises without any action or leadership to back them up?

If we retreat from the taxpayers' agenda now, then who really won the 1996 elections, despite our majority in Congress? If we do not carry out the taxpayers' agenda, we may as well pack up our bags and go home, because we will have failed. And the price of that failure will fall on the backs of those we were elected to represent.

We should make a good-faith effort to work with the President, present him with our plan to balance the budget and cut taxes this year, and if he cannot accept it, let the voters decide who is right and who is wrong. Bipartisan action should not translate into inaction, and trying to cooperate should not involve being coopted.

If Congress and the President find the courage to move forward, the rewards can be immense. Let me tell you what has happened in my home State of Minnesota, where the headlines focus on a budget surplus, not a deficit, and our taxpayers finally have something to smile about on the State level in Minnesota. It is an example of what can be achieved when leaders make a promise and stick to it, even when it is not the politically easy thing to do.

When Minnesota Gov. Arne Carlson was elected to office in 1990, he inherited a deficit greater than \$1.8 billion and a government that was spending 15 percent faster than the rate of inflation. The Governor and the State legislature cut spending by making the tough choices elected officials are supposed to make, decisions that met the needs of our residents and left no one behind. Thanks to that dedication, Minnesota today finds itself with a stronger economy, more jobs, an unemployment rate of just 3.5 percent, well below the national average, and a \$2.3 billion budget surplus.

So now the Governor has now presented a plan of tax relief that will cut income taxes in the State by an amazing 22 percent, offer \$900 million in property tax relief, \$150 million in education tax credits, and eliminate the sales tax on all capital equipment replacement. It has been an amazing turnaround for Minnesotans.

Tax relief and fiscal discipline have worked in Minnesota. It is a combination that can work for the rest of the country as well. We need to remember, however, that Rome was not built in 1 day and neither was big government. The problem will not be fixed in 1 day, one year, or even 2 years. But every journey begins with one step—it is our

job to ensure it is one step forward, not backward.

In less than a month, Tax Day will arrive, and in preparation, the American taxpayers will once again gather around their kitchen tables to take stock of their finances. One can almost hear the collective groan. Unfortunately, it is too late for Congress to make any changes to lighten the tax load this year. It is not too late to enact the tax relief that will fundamentally transform the next.

Mr. President, I did not come to the floor today to draw a line in the sand—at least not at this time. I must admit that I will be hard pressed to support any budget, any budget, that does not call for significant tax relief for the working families of Minnesota and each of the other 50 States. If we, as the majority, cannot deliver on this one, fundamental promise we made to the voters, we will have abandoned the taxpayers. And in doing so, we, the Republican majority, and this Congress as a whole, will have raised significant questions about our desire, and ability, to lead this Nation. It will be hard for us or this generation to explain to our children and to our grandchildren how we failed to provide them with a future as bright as the future that our parents and 200 years of generations left to us.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MEXICO CERTIFICATION ISSUE

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, I have a series of unanimous consent requests that may be necessary unless we get some agreement very quickly now from the minority leader.

I just came from a committee hearing, where I just finished testifying so I could come to the floor at 10:30 and call up the agreement entered into last night after monumental efforts by Senators on both sides of the aisle, working with the administration, with regard to the Mexico certification issue regarding drugs and how the drug war is being fought with the United States Government being involved and, of course, with the Mexican Government being involved, but in ways that are very troublesome.

I had hoped we could get started at 10:30, get a time agreement that was reasonable, maybe 4 hours equally divided, so we could have a full discussion about what is happening with regard to law enforcement efforts and dealing with drugs coming from Mexico into the United States, so we could talk about the President's difficult de-

cision to go forward with certification, but also to make sure that the American people understand that the Congress is not satisfied with the status quo. More must be done.

We have a right—in fact, we have an obligation—to get more from our Government's efforts in fighting the drug war and dealing with the flood of drugs that are killing America's children. They are flooding into this country from Mexico. We have a right to expect hardened drug criminals to be extradited into this country. Some of them have, some of them have not. We have a right to expect that our law enforcement people dealing with the drug barons, the drug lords, are able to defend themselves. We have a right to expect some thresholds to be met with regard to what Mexico must do and, frankly, what we must do in our Government. This is a very important issue, one that we cannot leave today or tomorrow without taking action on.

I want to say how much I appreciate the great effort by the Senators here on the floor now—Senator HUTCHISON from Texas, Senator COVERDELL from Georgia, Senator FEINSTEIN from California, and other Senators that have worked to try to do the responsible thing. I want to point out that these Senators, along with others, for a total of 40, wrote a letter to the President of the United States saying, "Mr. President, don't certify Mexico as doing what needs to be done in this drug battle that we are engaged in." The President did that.

Now, the House took an action that will allow them to put down some markers and, after 90 days, look and see if progress is being made and then, perhaps, act further. I believe that is the gist of their action. That resolution is pending here at the desk.

But, again, in a full, good-faith effort, the Senators have worked with the administration, which included a whole variety of people. I was stunned by all the people that got involved. The Secretary of State was involved; the head of our drug effort, General McCaffrey; the head of NSC, Sandy Berger; the Secretary of Treasury was there. It was a long list of people, and a lot of work was done. I think these Senators here gave a great deal. They wanted to say that these are some things that must be done and be certified by the President; when they are, we should have the right to have another vote on whether or not there should be decertification with waivers, or certification, or whatever. They agreed to not insist on that. But what they did do was reach an agreement that requires a report from the President, by September 1, on what is being done by our Government and by Mexico to do a better job.

Now, I finally decided last night that the administration really didn't want any action by the Senate. They want us to just leave and not do anything. We can't do that. The Senate should take action on something this important. So we will act on this. We will

vote. We will do it today, or we will do it tonight or tomorrow; it's OK with me. We are going to vote on this issue before we leave here.

There is a process where the Democratic leader cannot stop that—it is a privileged resolution, with 10 hours of debate and then a vote. I don't want to do it that way. I want us to come to an agreement. The resolution that I thought we were going to call up at 10:30 requires specific reporting on steps taken by Mexico and the United States to combat illegal narcotics trafficking. It makes clear the Senate view that Mexico has not done enough—and they have not. We have seen that many times. We have seen it with the devastating story recently about the top drug enforcer in Mexico who, as a matter of fact, had to be removed from office because he was, in fact, being involved in what he is supposed to be trying to control. That is as gently as I can possibly put it. I fear there are going to be more devastating reports like that.

The revision allowing for a vote, as I indicated, was dropped last night, after direct involvement by the Secretary of State, head of the NSC, as well as Senators here, and Senator MCCAIN was involved in that. But it makes clear that the administration and the Government of Mexico should provide real demonstrable progress by September. If they don't, under this procedure, we would not have another vote, but we can have more votes. There will be authorization bills, and there will be appropriations bills, like the State, Justice, Commerce bill. If we don't get a response or action here, the Senate has a powerful weapon called the power of the purse. We can withhold funds. We can make our views known.

Based on that, the fact that we can act in other ways with other vehicles, I thought this was a good agreement. I thought that the Senators here on the floor bent over backward to reach an agreement. Now, we have—get this picture—the Secretary of State, who is now in Helsinki, and the head of NSC, now in Helsinki, both directly involved, saying, yes, we can go with this. General McCaffrey, head of the drug administration, who was there and said, yes, we can go with this. Democrat and Republican Senators said yes. The majority leader says this is not perfect, but this is a responsible thing to do. And then what happens? There is a Democratic Caucus this morning. They meet and decide that because they can't dictate the schedule on another issue, because they can't make the majority leader give them a date certain on another unrelated issue, they want the United States Senate not to act on the drug problem in Mexico.

Now, my friends, this is a big-time loser for those that are objecting to this procedure. It cannot stand. We have to find a way to move this forward.

So all these administration officials are for it, Senate Republicans and