

that we know America truly is in a recession. We have known that for some time, but it is now officially proclaimed.

Not in any way to lessen the importance of a debate over election reform, and that is important, I cannot yet quite understand how we get all of this done in time to get out for Christmas.

Before the Thanksgiving recess, I had offered Senator BOXER of California an opportunity to join with me—she from the Democratic side, I from the Republican side—to organize Christmas caroling for the Senate so we could join together in unity, as we have for the last several weeks, and sing Christmas carols on the eve of Christmas.

I suggest if we are going to do election reform, if we are going to do a stimulus package, if we are going to do a farm bill, and I add an energy bill because I think right now energy is every bit as important to the American consumer as election reform is to the American voter, and let us see what else is on that schedule—oh, yes, I forgot, railroad retirement reform—then it is going to be a merry little Christmas in Washington for all Senators who cannot make it out the night before to their home States. My State is about 2,500 miles further away than the Senator from Connecticut. So I say to Senator DODD, have yourself a very merry little Christmas.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate at 4:48 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 5:30 p.m. when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. REID).

THE SENATE SCHEDULE

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, we have just completed our caucus. I know the Republicans were caucusing. I am not sure whether they have completed or not. I want to report to the Senate about our current circumstances and what the schedule might be for the remainder of the week.

Senator LOTT and I have been discussing the current schedule and our circumstances involving the railroad retirement bill. My hope is that we can move to proceed to the bill sometime within the next hour. If that is the case, it is my intention to file cloture on the bill at some point this evening.

It is also my intention that we seek unanimous consent to vote on cloture on Monday. We will not be in session on Saturday, but we will be on Monday. We will also entertain amendments. It is my understanding that Senator LOTT may be recognized to offer an amendment, and we will have a debate on that amendment tomorrow and on Monday.

My expectation is that there will not be any votes tonight or tomorrow but that we will have votes on Monday at approximately 5 o'clock.

Senator MURRAY reports to me that the Transportation conference report has now been completed, and it is my hope that we can vote on the Transportation conference report perhaps as early as Monday. If not Monday, then on Tuesday. My hope is that if we can achieve cloture on the railroad retirement bill on Monday, we can bring debate on the bill to a close by Wednesday.

It is then my intention, as I have said on several occasions, to make a motion to proceed to the farm bill. That is a must-pass piece of legislation. It is my hope and expectation that we can complete our work on that, maybe even as early as the end of next week.

I also note that we have made the decision over the course of the last few hours, and in consultation with Senator LOTT as well as our caucus, that we will be in session and voting the week of December 10. That has been an open question until now. But we have now made that decision. Our expectation is we will be voting every day the week after next. Senators ought to be on hand and prepared to vote all week. Of course, it may be that we will have to vote and be in session the week after that. But clearly, for the next 2 weeks the Senate will be in session and Senators need to be prepared to be on the floor and voting, to accommodate the remaining schedule we have for the remainder of this session of Congress.

I also presented to the caucus what amounts to an informal agreement on how we will proceed on the economic stimulus bill. I am pleased to report that our caucus has agreed with the proposal that has been presented to me by the Speaker, as we consider how to proceed on the economic stimulus bill. If we can reach a procedural agreement tonight, it is my expectation we can move to substantive negotiations on the economic stimulus bill tomorrow morning. It is my hope we can work on it through the weekend, if that is possible, in order to try to expedite our work on that bill and our efforts to reach some final agreement early next week.

The procedural agreement would call for consideration of the Senate Finance Committee bill, the House-passed economic stimulus bill, and other issues relating to those two bills. We do not exclusively limit our consideration of economic stimulus to those two vehicles. There are a lot of other issues out there.

Senator DURBIN in particular has expressed to the caucus on numerous occasions, and here on the floor, how important it is that we consider a payroll tax holiday. That is an issue I have indicated I am particularly interested in and intrigued with. I don't know whether or not we have the ability to work it into the agreement. I know

Senator DOMENICI has expressed an interest in the proposal, and Senator LOTT has noted his support for the proposal.

On our side, I don't think there has been any more ardent a supporter, any more articulate an advocate of the so-called payroll tax holiday than the distinguished senior Senator from Illinois. I applaud him and appreciate his tutorial to the caucus on the issue. He has been able to bring us to a better understanding of how it would work. I must say I am indebted to him for all of his work in advocating that particular issue.

But my point is that that, along with other vehicles, is going to be considered as we debate the issue in the hope that we can bring some resolution to our negotiations sometime early next week.

I see the Senator standing. I am happy to yield to him.

(Ms. STABENOW assumed the Chair.)

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the leader for his kind remarks.

I hope that in the course of this economic recovery or economic stimulus package we can still stick to our principles that what we do will help the economy, help the right people in the economy, and not do any long-term damage to the economy.

I think this proposed Federal payroll tax holiday, month-long holiday, meets the criteria. Frankly, it will go to workers across America who draw a paycheck. They will see it on payday. It will come as quickly as we can pass the bill and enact it into law. That is money that families can use for important purchases at the end of the year. It is money that will go right into the economy and spark some growth and some activity that we really do need. It is also money that is going to go to workers, to those making incomes up to \$80,000—\$80,400 is the limit on the Federal payroll tax. So that really gives it to working families.

In addition, it is focused to help small businesses because I think forgiving this tax for employers will say to small businesses, we are going to help you meet some of your expenses, whether they are health insurance premiums or security needs, for your business after September 11.

I have spoken to Senator DOMENICI. I thank my friend and the majority leader for his reference. I hope in the course of this conference, putting together the stimulus and recovery package, that this can be included.

Mr. DASCHLE. I thank the Senator from Illinois. His comments make my point. He is not only knowledgeable and articulate on the issue, but he has certainly persisted in ensuring that this piece of legislation be considered along with many others.

Madam President, there are several key areas the Democratic caucus—and it goes to the point raised by the Senator from Illinois—will be advocating.

First and foremost, I want to emphasize again because I feel the need every