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Senate

The Senate met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

O God, whose spirit searches all things and whose love bears all things, arise and lift up Your hand as we wait patiently for You. Give Your light, O God, and take away our darkness. Put a new song on our lips for we put our trust in You. Place Your precepts in our minds that we will delight to do Your will. Withhold not Your tender mercies from us, for Your loving-kindness keeps us alive.

Bless the Members of this body. Give them patience and cheerful endurance. Place peace in their hearts and serenity in their minds. Inspire them with an increased understanding of the scope of their task as Your servants.

Stretch forth Your right hand to help and defend us all. Encourage us to seek new depths of dedication.

We pray in Your wonderful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, we will begin consideration of the Labor-HHS conference report directly, with Senator HARKIN controlling the first 90 minutes. At the conclusion of that time we will return to the PATRIOT

NOTICE

If the 109th Congress, 1st Session, adjourns sine die on or before December 20, 2005, a final issue of the Congressional Record for the 109th Congress, 1st Session, will be published on Friday, December 30, 2005, in order to permit Members to revise and extend their remarks.

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By order of the Joint Committee on Printing.

TRENT LOTT, *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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Act conference and have a period of debate for the next 2 hours. We will recess at approximately 12:30 until 2:15, for a weekly policy luncheon.

At 2:15 we will have another block of time equally divided until 3:30. At 3:30 we have a stack of rollcall votes ordered on the remaining four motions to instruct conferees relative to the spending reduction bill. Those will be the first votes of the day. After that fourth vote, conferees will be named to that reconciliation measure. We will likely schedule additional votes in that 3:30 sequence and we will announce those votes as they are ordered.

I will have more to say on schedule as we proceed over the course of the day, both for the remainder of the day, this evening, this week, and possibly this weekend.

In the meantime, I will continue to remind Senators and ask that they do remain available over the course of the day and keep their schedules flexible for these votes.

I yield.

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2006—CONFERENCE REPORT

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 3010, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 3010) ''making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies, for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2006, and for other purposes,'' having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate, and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both houses.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of December 14, 2005.)

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be 90 minutes under the control of the Senator from Iowa, Mr. HARKIN.

Who yields time?

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

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, under the rule, I have 90 minutes—some of it has already been used up in the quorum call—to speak on the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies appropriations bill that is now before the Senate.

I again ask any Senator who wants to come over and speak on this time to try to be here before 10:30. I would be glad to yield time to Senators who want to come over and talk about this bill and why this bill should not be passed.

At this time of the year when we are seeing all the festive holiday decorations, Christmas trees, all the lights around, there is a certain mood about Christmas. It is a mood of being generous and understanding that it is the season for giving. It is the season for thinking about those who may be less fortunate than ourselves. It is also the time of the year when most families of means get together and think about their giving, how they are going to support charities or charitable giving toward the end of the year. It is true in churches all over the country and many nonprofit organizations. This is the time of year when people decide to give money to the churches, to everything, the Salvation Army, to all kinds of nonprofits. It is the time of the year when we remember ''A Christmas Carol'' by Charles Dickens, the wonderful stories about ''A Christmas Carol'' played in high school plays and theaters all over the country every year at this time.

Charles Dickens ''A Christmas Carol,'' the story of Ebenezer Scrooge. ''Bah humbug,'' remember that? That is his familiar saying about Christmas, ''bah humbug''—this tight man, ungenerous, miserly, stingy, with no feelings of compassion whatsoever to those less fortunate.

We all know what happened in ''A Christmas Carol.'' He is visited by the ghosts of Christmas past and the Christmas future. He then begins to see clearly that who he has been and what he has stood for is wrong.

The wonderful thing about Charles Dickens and ''A Christmas Carol'' is, at the end, Scrooge becomes compassionate and generous and changes his ways.

It is a wonderful story for this time of the year. If only life in Congress imitated that, if only Congress could follow the example of Ebenezer Scrooge in the final act of the play. I am sorry to say, in terms of the appropriations bill before us, the bill that funds those things that lift people up, that help the poorest in our society these days, to reach down, to give everyone hope, and try to make our society a little bit more fair and more just—that is what is in this bill. That is what this bill is about. But, sad to say, in this bill, as it is before us, Ebenezer Scrooge—the first Ebenezer Scrooge, the one before he changed in the final act—is in this bill. Scrooge reigns in this bill.

My friend and distinguished senior member of the Appropriations Committee, the Senator from Hawaii, DAN INOUYE, once said of the Defense appropriations bill that it defends America. The Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education bill, he said, is the bill that defines America. I have thought about that over the years. He said that a long time ago. I have thought about that over the years, as I have been chairman of the subcommittee and ranking member, and chairman and ranking member. Both Senator SPECTER and I have changed places on this subcommittee now I think going back over 15 years. I have thought about that, that this is really the bill that defines America.

So how do we want to define America? As the haves with the beautiful Christmas tree, with all the lights, nice cars, warm clothes, good food, who send their kids to the best schools, live in the best neighborhoods? That is America? That is it, that is America? And then down below we have people barely scraping to get by, who don't know how they are going to pay the heating bills in the winter, the elderly, disabled, the poor, those who want to get job training, they have lost their job, but they want to work and are looking for job training assistance; families with meager means who want their kids to get a head start in life so they want to send their kids to a Head Start Program so that their kids, too, will have a decent shot at the American dream; or families who are low income and have poor schools to go to and so they want to at least have good teachers and good facilities and good programs and textbooks and things for their kids so that their kids, too, can get up on that ladder of success; or families who live in low-income areas who have no health care insurance, have no health care, and the only thing they have to go to is the community health center for their health needs, and that is there for them.

I don't know. What kind of America do we want? Do we want an America where at least at this time of the year we think generously? In this beautiful country that we have, all of the riches that we have, can we not find it in our hearts to pass an appropriations bill that at least, at least, does not back down from where we were before? You would think that would sort of be the minimum. You would think at least at this time of the year we would say, well, we are not going to do any more for low-income people, but we are not going to cut them back any more either. You would sort of think that would be the bottom line.

Sad to say, of all of the appropriations bills that this Congress has passed this year, this is the only appropriations bill that is cut below last year's level. This bill, the one that funds education and health, the one that reaches down to help low-income people, this is the one that is cut, the only one, the only one that is cut.

Please, someone explain this to me. Interior appropriations, Transportation appropriations, Agriculture appropriations, Military Construction and Veterans, Foreign Operations, Commerce-State-Justice appropriations, Homeland Security, Energy and