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Senate

The Senate met at 4 p.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.

Eternal Spirit, thank You for Your steadfast love and Your unchanging mercy. Your wondrous deeds sustain us and Your compassion keeps us secure. Help us not to have inflated notions of our importance but seek instead to live so that we are worthy of honor, even if it never comes. Remind us that true greatness comes through service, and may we esteem others as better than ourselves. Give us wisdom to follow Your example of generous self sacrifice, and keep us from returning to dead-end paths.

Bless our lawmakers today. Strengthen them in their challenging work of striving to find common ground. Shield them from strife and division as they seek unity for the good of our Nation and world. Empower them to trust You without wavering.

We pray this in Your holy 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.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

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.

All material for insertion must be signed by the Member and delivered to the respective offices of the Official Reporters of Debates (Room HT–60 or S–123 of the Capitol), Monday through Friday, between the hours of 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. through Thursday, December 29. The final issue will be dated Friday, December 30, 2005, and will be delivered on Tuesday, January 3, 2006. Both offices will be closed Monday, December 26, 2005.

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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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SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, today I do not anticipate a lengthy session, but we are here for important work. We need to pass a short-term continuing resolution, and we are waiting for the House to send us a joint resolution. We expect to clear a package of nominations this afternoon, and we will do that block of executive nominations by voice vote. We will also continue to process some of the other legislative items that have been cleared and are ready to move.

Final discussions continue on the remaining must-do items, and I am hopeful that we will be soon able to take action on these items over the next couple of days. Members will be asking about the schedule, and I will make further announcements shortly on tomorrow's lineup. I want to confer with the chairmen and principals involved in the negotiation and then say more at the close of business today. Again, we will wrap up our work today in as quick a time as possible, and Members should stay tuned as everything is finalized.

There is a lot of work going on in the Capitol today—until late last night and until the early hours of the morning. Just last night and over the last several days we passed very important pieces of legislation. If we look back on Friday, last night, we passed cord blood legislation, which opens up critical new research opportunities and clearinghouses for safe, ethically sound transplantation. That is going to save lives.

We passed the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005, which will provide a second major round of critical tax relief to our brothers and sisters in the gulf coast region.

We extended the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act, which takes another step toward reducing taxpayers' risk and minimizing the Government's interference with the private market.

We passed an important new provision in the Violence Against Women Act, which will protect rape survivors who have already been victimized once by sexual assault.

We passed the Bahrain Free Trade Agreement this past week, which enhances our bilateral relationship with a strategic friend and ally.

I mention all of these because a lot of them we do actually in what we call wrap-up or by unanimous consent but all are major pieces of legislation. We now have, over the next several days—and I hope it is as few as possible—very important legislation on Defense, both appropriations and authorization, as well as the deficit reconciliation package and nominations that I mentioned. So we have a lot of work to do over the next several days.

RECOGNITION OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. REID. Through the Chair to the distinguished majority leader, there is some confusion over here because at one time last night, on the conference report on defense authorization—it was signed by everybody. Does the leader have the latest word on that? Senator WARNER and Senator LEVIN, because they were trying to stick other stuff in the bill, were going to withdraw their signatures. Do we know if that happened?

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, through the Chair, I know it has not passed the House yet. I will have to check and see what the current status is on the Department of Defense authorization. I will have to check and see what the current status of that is. It was my understanding that would be ready at some point—or as of late last night they would be ready sometime today. The House has not yet acted on that.

Mr. REID. We hope to have the Defense appropriations bill tonight or tomorrow? When is that expected?

Mr. FRIST. Defense appropriations will likely be tomorrow. There are several items that remain to be wrapped up. Most of the meetings over the course of last night and today have been with the objective of having that wrapped up as soon as possible, but that will much more likely be tomorrow. It will not be tonight.

Mr. REID. Does the leader have some indication as to what the schedule will be Monday? The leader has indicated that there will be no votes today or tomorrow. Are we going to have votes Monday?

Mr. FRIST. We know we are not going to have rollcall votes today. We will be in a very short period of time today. I would think tomorrow, depending on how things go over the next couple of hours, we would come in fairly late waiting on action from the House of Representatives. Once we have a better feel when they are going to act tonight or in the morning, we will set a time to open tomorrow.

We have not said no rollcall votes tomorrow, but we will be able to say that for sure in just a bit, in all likelihood. Then I expect we will need to come in early Monday and vote early Monday because at that point in time we should have legislation coming from the House. So Monday is going to be a very full day. For right now—we can talk shortly if something else indicates otherwise—we would plan on voting Monday morning.

Mr. REID. I told my Senators on call that they should be ready to go Monday morning, by 10 or so. Is that a fair statement?

Mr. FRIST. I think that is a perfect goal and that we mutually share that, that we could start voting as early as Monday morning. Since we will be in tomorrow, if we can update that because most of our—many of our Senators are out around the country, we will do just that.

AVIAN FLU

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I want to make a very brief statement on an issue that I believe requires action before we leave. It is something we have addressed on the floor of the Senate, actually in several different capacities, but I want to restate the importance of that. It has to do with a potential pandemic of an avian or bird influenza—the so-called bird flu. In the 20th century, we have had three influenza pandemics. Remember, about 30,000 people in this country die every year from the seasonal flu. But superimposed on this seasonal flu, on three occasions in the last 100 years, there have been these pandemics. What our public health officials and what our scientists say is, for sure, we are going to have another pandemic. The time is in the near future, and a pandemic is going to occur, but we don't know exactly when. The worst of the three pandemics in the last 100 years was in 1918, the so-called Spanish flu—although it was called the Spanish flu, it probably started actually in Kansas—but that flu went through our population in a period of weeks and killed about half a million people; worldwide it killed somewhere around 40 million people.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary Leavitt, warns if past is prologue, the world is overdue for another flu pandemic. I agree with that assessment. The pandemic will occur. We do not know exactly when. But we know we are drastically underprepared; not unprepared but underprepared. If we act with action now, we will be prepared. Preparation means much less destruction or potential destruction by such a pandemic.

The avian flu over the last couple of years has spread from East Asia, to Romania, to Turkey. It looks and acts more similar to the virus of 1918 than either of the other two pandemics, the one in 1957 and the one in 1968. If it achieves the final step in what becomes a pandemic, that is, human-to-human transmission—the first couple of steps are that it is a novel virus, a new virus, and that it spreads to other species, multiple species, and the third big step is transmission, human-to-human transmission. In that case, the consequences could be catastrophic both in loss of human life as well as in economic meltdown in many ways.

Recently, in the last several weeks, the Congressional Budget Office released a study which I had requested specifically on the economic impact of a serious and a mild pandemic of avian flu. Their report demonstrated—much higher than I expected—a 5-percent decline in our gross domestic product over the course of a year. That is about a $675 billion hit if we were to have a severe pandemic of this avian flu. The clock is ticking. If a pandemic occurs and we are underprepared, if it were to occur today and it were severe, the Congressional Budget Office predicts, with their best economists and access