

## SENATE—Thursday, October 28, 1999

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

### PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Jehovah-Shalom, You have promised us peace that passes all understanding. That is the quality of the peace that we need for today. It is beyond our understanding that You can produce serenity in our souls when there is so much that is unfinished and unresolved and unforgiven in us; in our relationships, in our work, and in our society. Sometimes we even deny ourselves the calm confidence of Your peace because we are so aware of what denies Your peace in us. Take from us the strain and stress as our anxious hearts confess our need for You. Grant us Your incomprehensible but indispensable, palpable peace so we can be peacemakers. Give the Senators a fresh infusion of Your peace so that they may deal with the disagreements and discord of the legislative process. Help them to overcome problems and endure the pressures of these days. In the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable MIKE CRAPO, a Senator from the State of Idaho, 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.

### RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able Senator from Idaho is recognized.

### SCHEDULE

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10:30 a.m. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the pending Ashcroft amendment to H.R. 434, the African trade bill. As a reminder, there will be a cloture vote on the substitute amendment 1 hour after convening tomorrow. It is still hoped that an agreement can be reached to allow the Senate to complete action on this trade bill by the end of the week. The Senate may also consider any legislative or executive items cleared for action.

I thank my colleagues for their attention.

### MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I seek recognition in morning business, and I make an inquiry of the Chair as to how much time has been allocated in morning business.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 10 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank the Chair.

### FINISHING THE SENATE'S BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, many people who are watching the business of Capitol Hill are curious as to the current state of affairs. We are obviously past our deadline of October 1 for a new fiscal year. We were supposed to have passed all of the appropriations or spending bills by that time. Very few Congresses ever achieve that, and this Congress did not. But most Congresses reach a point in the late days of October where we at least know the end game, we know how it is going to end, and we are merely putting paperwork together.

Well, we are not quite there yet. In fact, we are in a situation where there is great doubt about how this session will come to an end, and it is a great irony that we would be questioning how it will end in light of all the circumstances that we face. This is an extraordinarily good time for America in terms of the state of our economy, its growth, the creation of jobs, keeping inflation under control, and giving businesses opportunities to start and expand. All of these things are good signs. In fact, we are generating enough money now in terms of revenues to the Federal Government that we have gone beyond the era of deficits and have now started talking about the era of surpluses.

It was a little over 2 years ago that we were fixated in this Chamber on passing a constitutional amendment to balance the budget. There were some Members of the Senate who had literally given up hope that the Senate could meet its own responsibility, and they insisted that a constitutional amendment be passed to give the Federal courts the authority to enforce the law and stop Congress from spending. That is how desperate many of these Members of the Senate were in terms of the deficit situation.

Well, things have changed dramatically; 2½ years later we now seem to be at an impasse over a surplus, not over a deficit. That amendment did not pass. It lost by one vote. I voted

against it and would do it again. Now we are talking about surpluses and what to do with them.

The interesting thing about this debate, though, is we are not focusing on individual appropriations bills but really keep returning to a subject that has been around since 1935, because it was in 1935 that Franklin Roosevelt showed the vision and the political courage to create Social Security. In creating the Social Security system, he really said that we were going to do something dramatic to make sure our parents and grandparents could live in dignity when they reached retirement age. Some people, primarily from the other side of the aisle, called it socialism. They said, no, we aren't going to go along with "New Deal" politics creating these massive government programs. This same Republican voice was heard time and again for decades over the creation of Social Security; that it was a bad idea; it was socialism; it was too much government.

Yet the program endured. Thank goodness it did because it changed the lives of Americans for the better and gave us hope that in our senior years, in our years of retirement, we could be independent and live in dignity. Look at what we have today—so many healthy, vibrant seniors leading great lives, knowing they have a safety net called Social Security in which they have invested through all of their work experience. It is not enough to lead a luxurious life by far, but it certainly gives people that safety net, and they are glad they have it.

We are debating about what to do with Social Security as we end this session. It is a principal source of retirement income for two-thirds of the elderly. Listen to these statistics: In 1959, 40 years ago, the poverty rate for senior citizens was 35 percent, one out of three. In 1998, it was 10.5 percent, the lowest on record. Last year, Social Security benefits lifted roughly 15 million senior citizens out of poverty.

That is what it means. It means people who would not be able to make it can make it, at least barely make it, if they are relying on Social Security. It is more than just a retirement program because one out of five people who receive benefits under Social Security are either disabled, mentally or physically, or they are the survivors of those who paid into the system.

We on the Democratic side have for years advocated the protection of Social Security. In that debate I mentioned earlier about a balanced budget amendment, we offered an amendment on our side and said we did not want