

SENATE—Thursday, September 20, 2001

The Senate met at 8:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable DEBBIE STABENOW, a Senator from the State of Michigan.

PRAYER

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

God of grace and God of glory, on the Congress pour Your power. Grant these leaders wisdom; grant them courage for the facing of this hour. We pray for our President, George W. Bush, tonight as he speaks to the joint session of Congress about the soul-sized issues confronting our Nation and the world. May this evening be a defining hour in our history. Reveal Your strategy for exorcising the evil treachery of terrorism. Draw us into Your inspiring presence, then into one another in shared patriotism, then to loyalty to our Commander in Chief in mutual commitment to seek and do Your will in the battle against this insidious, infamous threat to the freedom and peace of our world. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable DEBBIE STABENOW 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 20, 2001.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable DEBBIE STABENOW, a Senator from the State of Michigan, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Ms. STABENOW thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

MEASURES PLACED ON CALENDAR—S. 1438 AND S. 1439

Mr. REID. Madam President, I understand that the following bills are at the desk having been read for the first time: S. 1438 and S. 1439. I ask unani-

mous consent that it be in order en bloc for these two bills to have received a second reading, and I would then object to any further consideration of this legislation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bills will be placed on the calendar.

AUTHORITY TO APPOINT A COMMITTEE TO ESCORT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES INTO THE HOUSE CHAMBER

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the President pro tempore of the Senate be authorized to appoint a committee on the part of the Senate to join with a like committee on the part of the House of Representatives to escort the President of the United States into the House Chamber for the joint session to be held at 9 p.m. on Thursday, September 20, 2001.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for not to extend beyond the hour of 8:40 p.m. with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to five minutes.

A HOUSE UNITED

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, in the wake of the terrible events of September 11, 2001, there have been reports of senseless acts of gun violence against innocent Americans, whose only crime was their ethnicity or religion. In this time of national crisis we must not lose sight that it is our diversity, our freedom to worship, and our steadfast commitment to liberty and the rule of law that form the foundation of this great Nation. While it has shaken, standing together we can ensure that the American house remains strong. And it is unity that guarantees our ultimate victory.

SURVIVOR BENEFIT PLAN AMENDMENT TO THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL FOR FISCAL YEAR 2002

Mr. THURMOND. Mr. President, today, I am offering an amendment to the national Defense authorization bill for fiscal year 2002 that would correct the longstanding injustice to the widows or widowers of our military retirees. The proposed legislation, which reflects the language of S. 145 which I introduced on January 23, 2001, would immediately increase for surviving spouses over the age 62 the minimum survivor Benefit Plan, SBP, annuity from 35 percent to 40 percent of the SBP covered retired pay. The bill would provide a further increase to 45 percent of covered retired pay as of October 1, 2004, and to 55 percent as of September 2011.

As I outlined in my many statements in support of this important legislation the Survivor Benefit Plan advertises, that if the service member elects to join the plan, his survivor will receive 55 percent of the member's retirement pay. Unfortunately, that is not so. The reason that they do not receive the 55 percent of retired pay is that current law mandates that at age 62 this amount be reduced either by the amount of the survivor's Social Security benefit or to 35 percent of the SBP. This law is especially irksome to those retirees who joined the plan when it was first offered in 1972. These service members were never informed of the age-62 reduction until they had made an irrevocable decision to participate. Many retirees and their spouses, as our constituent mail attests, believed their premium payments would guarantee 55 percent of retired pay for the life of the survivor. It is not hard to imagine the shock and financial disadvantage these men and women who so loyally served the Nation for many years experience when they learn of the annuity reduction.

Uninformed services retirees pay too much for the available SBP benefit both, compared to what we promised and what we offer other Federal retirees. When the Survivor Benefit Plan was enacted in 1972, the Congress intended that the government would pay 40 percent of the cost to parallel the government subsidy of the Federal civilian survivor benefit plan. That was short-lived. Over time, the government's cost sharing has declined to about 26 percent. In other words, the retiree's premiums now cover 74 percent of expected long-term program costs versus the intended 60 percent. Contrast this with the Federal civilian