

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 15, 2014.

To the Senate:

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

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. DONNELLY thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SENATE CHAPLAIN, DR. BARRY C. BLACK

Mr. REID. Mr. President, for those watching the opening of the Senate, I am sure some are wondering why the Chaplain was dressed in a Navy dress uniform. He is an admiral in the U.S. Navy. He has spent many years traveling the world, and we are so fortunate to have this good man here.

It is always difficult to know what to call him—doctor, chaplain, mister, admiral, and on and on. But what I call him is just a fine man, a real gentleman. So for those who are watching, he has his uniform on because he is an admiral in the U.S. Navy.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks, the Senate will proceed to executive session to debate the Murthy, Santos, Rose, Saldana, and Blinken nominations.

BLINKEN NOMINATION

I am not going to speak extensively on any of these. I will just say now, Tony Blinken I have known for many years. He was integral to the success of JOE BIDEN, as U.S. Senator, and has been with him as Vice President. Now he is going to be the second in command at the State Department.

When we have our briefings in the classified room, there is no one who is more articulate and can answer the questions any better than Tony

Blinken. I have great admiration for him. I think we as a country are so fortunate he is going to be in the position he is in.

At 5:30 today there will be four roll-call votes. Those votes will be as follows: cloture on Murthy to be Surgeon General of the United States, confirmation of the Murthy nomination, cloture on the Santos nomination to be a member of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, and cloture on Executive Calendar No. 635, Frank Rose to be an Assistant Secretary of State.

This man has been waiting 513 days, an extremely important job: verification of plants, nuclear. I don't think the Republicans dislike him. They don't like the job he is going to have. They have left it basically empty for all this time.

So we have some important stuff to do. We can complete everything we wanted to today—today. Everything that is scheduled now for the week, we can finish today. I hope everyone understands we can move forward, but we are going to have to be here until we finish our work, whether that is Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday or Saturday. So everyone should understand they can't be leaving.

I know we all have things to do. I haven't been home in such a long time and I want to go home. I bought a new home there. As everyone knows, I sold my place in Searchlight and bought a home in the Greater Las Vegas area. I would like to be able to see the home. I have not slept in it. We bought it in May and I have not been there. My wife is there waiting, getting ready for the move in, which is now taking place. So we have a lot of work to do. We have to work together to get it done as quickly as possible.

TRIBUTE TO DEPARTING SENATORS

MARK BEGICH

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Alaska is a State unlike any other State in the country. Often referred to as the "last frontier," Alaska's landscape is as breathtakingly beautiful as it is immense. Its residents are some of the most kind and accepting people one would ever meet. Any person who represents the State of Alaska must possess a true love for the exceptional beauty of this region and the vastness of it. It is so far away from everything. The capital Juneau, you can only get there in an airplane. That is the only way you can get to the capital of the State of Alaska. So I am going to spend a little bit of time talking about Senator MARK BEGICH and his faithful service to the people of Alaska.

There is no surprise that he is dedicated to Alaska and the people of Alaska. His father, Congressman Nick Begich, was dedicated to Alaska, as has been his mom Peggy. They moved to the then-Territory of Alaska in 1957 to teach school. Congressman Begich became involved in Alaskan politics and

successfully ran for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Tragedy struck. The whip of the House, Hale Boggs, and he were in Alaska campaigning and they were flying to an event. The plane disappeared. They searched, they searched, they searched. After 2 months, Congressman Boggs, Congressman Begich, and the pilot were declared dead. Their plane and bodies to this day have not been found. They are hidden someplace in the vastness of Alaska, in one of the mountains or the many bodies of water. We don't know.

In spite of this heartbreaking loss, the Begich family has pushed on. His mother continued to raise six children alone while managing real estate properties and being active in local politics.

By the age of 17, MARK had already acquired his mother's business acumen, starting his first business, a jewelry venture, and also owning and managing real estate. One reason Senator BEGICH has been a good Senator is because of his innate business acumen.

At age 26, he was elected to the Anchorage Assembly, which is the city council, a position he held for 10 years. Then in 2003 he was elected mayor of Anchorage. He served two terms before running for the Senate.

Now, 2008 was a dark time for Alaskan politics, but MARK's Senate victory brought a fresh face and new hope to the State. From the time he stepped foot on the Senate floor, he has not let the people of Alaska down. He has fought to expand economic opportunity, to defend the rights of Alaska Natives, and to fortify rural Alaska. Senator BEGICH's efforts to reform the Alaskan veterans health care system was exemplary, and it is a blueprint for a bipartisan solution that the Senate reached this year to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Senator BEGICH has made tremendous contributions to the Senate over the past 6 years. I know he will continue to fight for what is best for Alaska as he transitions into the next stage of his life. I hope public service is somewhere in MARK's future. Every State needs a man of his quality. He will always have his wife Deborah and his son Jacob by his side.

I can remember the first time I saw Jacob was right behind us by the Ohio clock. President Obama walked by and that little boy yelled "Obama!" So his little boy loves politics.

It has truly been an honor to serve with Senator BEGICH. I am glad he has been part of our leadership team as head of the steering committee. He has done a remarkable, good job. I thank him again for his service to the Senate and certainly to our country.

MARK UDALL

Mr. President, the famous English poet William Blake once said, "Great things are done when men and mountains meet." There could be nothing more apt when talking about MARK UDALL than when we talk about men and mountains. He knows mountains.