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Senate

The Senate met at 9:45 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JIM DEMINT, a Senator from the State of South Carolina.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, a nation turns its heart and mind to You. Give hope to those who are underpaid and overworked. Sustain the lonely and empty, particularly those who have lost loved ones in the defense of freedom. Fill the vacuum created by such sadness with Your presence, lest loneliness shackle their faith.

Today, bless our Senators. You know their needs. Supply them from Your celestial bounty. Show them duties left undone. Strengthen them to resist temptation in all of its enticements and to walk the narrow way of discipline that leads to life. Enrich them with Your powerful presence and keep them faithful.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

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. STEVENS.)

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, D.C., September 19, 2006.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JIM DEMINT, a Senator from the State of South Carolina, to perform the duties of the Chair.

TED STEVENS,
President pro tempore.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Today, following the opening remarks of the two leaders, we will have a 30-minute period of morning business. Following that time, we will return to the United States-Oman Free Trade Agreement for closing remarks. The agreement provides for a vote on passage at 12 noon today, and that will be the first vote of the day. The Senate will then recess from 12:30 to 2:15 to allow the weekly policy meetings to occur.

When the Senate resumes business at 2:15, we will proceed to executive session for the consideration of the Alice Fisher nomination. We have an order for 5½ hours of debate on the Fisher nomination prior to the vote on confirmation. We expect some of that time to be yielded back, and we will vote on that nomination this evening before adjourning.

Last night, I filed a cloture motion on the motion to proceed to H.R. 6061, the Secure Fence Act of 2006. That cloture vote will occur on Wednesday morning, and we hope we can invoke cloture and dispose of this bill quickly.

OMAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I wish to take a few moments to comment on the bill we will be voting on later this morning, the Oman Free Trade Agreement.

On June 29, the Senate passed the Oman Free Trade Agreement by a vote of 60 to 34. Today, we will bring the Oman Free Trade Agreement to the floor again for final passage of the House bill.

We have a long history with Oman. Our relationship has extended for near-

ly 200 years. It dates back to 1833, when a treaty of friendship and navigation was signed with Muscat. Oman was the first Arab country to send an ambassador to the United States.

Over the years, Oman has offered us valuable support. When we needed a local airbase for an attempt to rescue U.S. Embassy hostages in Iran during the Carter administration, Oman volunteered. When we needed a safe ground for our troops during Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom, Oman volunteered.

Today, Oman cooperates closely with us and other allies on counterterrorism and has publicly supported the democratic transition in Iraq. Although not a formal member of the coalition, Oman has been a committed, dependent ally in the global war on terror.

In Oman, we have found a solid partner on terrorist finance issues. Oman partners with its neighbors on transborder terror threats, and Oman's Government and religious leaders consistently and courageously denounce acts of terror and religious intolerance.

It is clear that through nearly 200 years of formal relations, we have enjoyed a close and cooperative partnership that continues to expand.

The free-trade agreement before us builds on the progress already made. It strengthens our relationship with a key friend and ally in the region, and it is a model for free trade in the entire Persian Gulf region.

It is not our first bilateral agreement in the region. We struck similar deals with Jordan in 2000, with Morocco in 2004, and with Bahrain in 2005. Like these earlier deals, the Oman agreement will open and expand opportunities for exports of many American products. America's workers, manufacturers, consumers, farmers, ranchers, and service providers will all benefit.

As soon as the agreement takes effect, Oman and the United States will provide each other immediate duty-

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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free access on virtually all products in our tariff schedules. This includes all consumer and industrial products. We will phase out tariffs on the remaining products within 10 years. Former Trade Representative Rob Portman called it "a high-quality, comprehensive free trade agreement that will contribute to economic growth and trade."

Unfortunately, some have sought to undermine the agreement. They have propagated myths that don't stand up to scrutiny. For example, despite claims to the contrary, Oman does not implement any aspect of the Arab boycott of Israel. Oman publicly affirms and has reaffirmed its position in a letter from its Commerce Minister in September 2005. Moreover, Oman neither tolerates nor allows the use of slave labor. Oman has made substantial commitments to the United States on labor reform, and it has promised to enact key reforms by October 31, 2006.

Rejecting the trade agreement would send a strong negative signal to our friends in the Middle East. Oman is a forward-looking Arab country on a range of social and economic issues. We must demonstrate our support to Oman, just as Oman has supported us.

As the 9/11 Commission advised, expanding trade with the Middle East will "encourage development, more open societies, and opportunities for people to improve the lives of their families." Passing the agreement before us will promote economic reform and development in the Persian Gulf, and it will advance our goal of a freer and more open Middle East. Quite simply, it will move our allies forward, and it will move America forward.

I urge my colleagues to demonstrate their commitment to these goals by voting to pass the Oman Free Trade Agreement later this morning.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the 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 up to 30 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the second half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for the minority side.

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

DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE HEARINGS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I commend my colleague, Senator DORGAN of

North Dakota, for a hearing he held yesterday. It was a hearing of the Democratic Policy Conference. This is the 10th hearing he has held. I attended with several other Senators. The hearings are held on Monday because they cannot be held during the ordinary course of business of the Senate.

The reason, I am afraid, is very clear. Senator DORGAN is considering an issue which no other committee in Congress will consider. Senator DORGAN is raising questions which no other committee on Capitol Hill will even suggest. Senator DORGAN and the Democratic Policy Conference are calling witnesses to testify openly on issues which the majority in this Republican-led Congress will not even consider. What could that possibly be? It turns out to be the conduct of our war in Iraq and, particularly, the waste and mismanagement of Federal tax dollars.

Yesterday, there were several former employees of Halliburton. We all know them now; they are infamous. This is the company with the no-bid contracts—\$7 billion worth—and friends in high places all over this administration. This is the company which made millions of dollars off of taxpayer funds and, sadly, often at the expense of our soldiers.

Yesterday, the testimony was very clear. There was one witness who talked about this fitness center that was put up for our troops and an Internet center for our troops, and Halliburton was going to run it. It turns out they dramatically inflated the number of soldiers walking through the door so they could make more money on the center, ripping off the taxpayers. It turns out that the supplies they were given for our troops, Halliburton ended up consuming for their own employees, having Super Bowl parties, using the food and drink that had been prepared for our troops.

One of the witnesses yesterday said there was a certain arrogance of the Halliburton contractors when it came to our troops. They were annoyed when the soldiers asked for certain things. It was all about profit. It was all about them.

Why in the world hasn't a single committee in the Senate called Halliburton in to answer for these things? Because Halliburton has friends in high places. People don't ask these rude and embarrassing questions of this powerful special interest corporation.

I thank Senator DORGAN and the Democratic Policy Conference for continuing to bring in the whistleblowers. One would think there would be a Member of the Republican Senate embarrassed enough at Halliburton's conduct in this war in Iraq that they would join us in a bipartisan effort. Sadly, this do-nothing Republican Congress has been a coverup Republican Congress as well. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to raise the questions.

Do you think the feature in the Washington Post this last Sunday

would have invoked at least some response from the Republican chairmen of major committees in the Senate? It was an exposé. It showed that when we created this provisional authority in Iraq to create a civil society, it turned out to be a patronage operation, worse than Brown and FEMA when it came to Katrina.

What they did was screen employees who were headed over to Iraq to spend billions of dollars and ask them probing questions about their qualifications. And do you know what the questions were. Here are some of the questions: How did you vote in the last primary? Did you vote for President Bush? What is your position on the issue of abortion? Where do you stand in terms of the Republican Party of America?

These were the questions asked of people we sent over to manage billions of dollars, our taxpayers' dollars, and rebuild Iraq. Is it any wonder we are in the fourth year in a war with no end? Is it any wonder that Iraq today is still in shambles from the viewpoint of its civil government? Is it any wonder when one looks at this gross incompetence, the same type of incompetence, patronage, and favoritism we saw, sadly, with Hurricane Katrina when Americans were disadvantaged?

There was a time in the history of this great institution when no President could get by with what this administration is getting by with. There was a time when a Democratic Senate would challenge a Democratic President, when a man named Harry Truman would stand up and say: We are going to look at profiteering and waste in waging the war against the Nazis and those who are their allies, even if we have a Democratic President, even if it might embarrass him.

Sadly, those days are gone. This Congress stands mute. This Congress refuses to ask the hard questions of this administration. This Congress refuses to acknowledge the obvious. We have lost 2,686 American soldiers in Iraq, and over 20,000 have returned home seriously injured. We have spent over \$325 billion. The scandalous conduct of contractors over there, deserving of investigation, has been made a matter of public record because of Senator DORGAN's hearings, and this administration and this Republican Congress refuse to ask the hard questions. Clearly, it is time for a change.

It is a time for new leadership that will ask these hard questions on behalf of our soldiers and our taxpayers.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, how much time remains?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Five minutes.

Mr. DORGAN. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Illinois. I appreciate him attending the hearing yesterday. As he indicated, we would prefer not to do oversight hearings. That is a job for