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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, March 13, 2015, at 11 a.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2015

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, most high, thank You for being light in our darkness, food for our hunger, peace for our pressures, joy for our sorrow, forgiveness for our failures, strength for our weakness, guidance for our confusion, and health for our sickness.

May our Senators labor today with the knowledge that You are everything they need. When they feel uncertain about the next step to take, supply their needs from Your bountiful riches. Lord, keep them from stumbling or slipping as they strive to live lives that honor You. May they ever do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with You.

We pray in Your great 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HELLER). The majority leader is recognized.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act is one of the most bipartisan pieces of legislation one could possibly imagine. Ever since this bipartisan human rights bill was introduced by a Democrat and a Republican in January and made publicly available for any person to read, Members of both parties have sung its praises repeatedly. This bipartisan bill has gained the support of 13 Democratic cosponsors.

Recently, Democrats voted unanimously to approve it in committee. This week Democrats consented unanimously to advance it on the floor. Even the Democratic leader himself said he “underscore[d], appreciate[d], and agree[d]” with my call to pass this bipartisan legislation overwhelmingly. “I doubt there will be problems on my side,” he said. “If there are, I will work to clear them.”

That was Monday.

By Tuesday, Democrats seemed to be threatening to filibuster human rights legislation for abused and neglected victims and children. Let me repeat that. Democrats are now threatening to filibuster human rights legislation for abused and neglected victims and children. So why?

Democrats now say they don’t like language that has been in the bill since it was introduced months ago that does nothing more than reaffirm the bipartisan law of the land. That is all that language does. This bipartisan provision was on page 4 of this modest-sized bill, so Democrats obviously knew it was there to begin with. Democrats ob-

viously wouldn’t have cosponsored the bill or voted for it in committee or called for passage on the floor if they hadn’t read the bill first.

These Democrats surely don’t want to see more quotes such as this one from an official with the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. She said: “Senate Democrats are choosing a phantom problem over real victims.”

So if these Democrats keep their word to the victims of human trafficking, then a partisan filibuster attempt will fail overwhelmingly. If these Democrats keep their word to the vulnerable and the oppressed, then the Senate will pass a bipartisan human rights bill.

But if these Democrats truly are having second thoughts about supporting such important human rights legislation, they are free to offer an amendment. But let’s not filibuster bipartisan help for vulnerable victims just to make a point for leftwing special interest groups.

Our Democratic friends have to resist the siren song of their pollsters who tell them that the path to victory lies in turning bipartisan bills into manufactured fights over cultural issues. Americans are looking for statesmen and stateswomen on the Democratic side to stand up—stand up—and help us emancipate the victims of modern slavery, not score another empty political point.

So I am calling on these Democrats to help us do that. Help is almost there for the vulnerable victims of these awful crimes. Surely no leftwing special interest group is more important than fighting modern-day slavery. So

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



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the Democratic cosponsors and declared supporters of this bill need to keep working with us in a bipartisan way to ensure that help comes.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, McClatchy News has a story that I think is worth talking about, a part of it at least, this morning. It says:

Newspaper editorial pages around the country have not been kind to Senate Republicans this week. A collective "Seriously?" has emerged in reaction to the open letter that 47 Republicans penned to the Iranian leadership, which seemed designed to undercut nuclear talks with the Obama administration.

Here are some of the things they said:

"A blot on 114th U.S. Senate," from the Detroit Free Press.

"The Senators who signed the letter should be ashamed," said the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

Some sounded embarrassed.

"Cringe-worthy buffoonery on the global stage," says the Salt Lake Tribune.

Others seemed just weary of Capitol Hill's continuing dysfunction.

"Has Congress gone crazy?" wondered the Courier-Journal in Louisville, KY.

Senator MARK KIRK of Illinois "has not been among the crazies in Congress, particularly on foreign policy matters. But he joined them here," wrote the Peoria Journal Star.

Noting her signature endorsing the letter, the Concord Monitor said of New Hampshire Republican Senator KELLY AYOTTE:

"It's not every day that a United States senator attempts to undermine U.S. foreign policy and weaken the nation in one cursive swoop."

In Phoenix, AZ, the Arizona Republic editorial board concluded that the Republican Senators "are effectively declaring a congressional right to conduct subversive foreign policy proxy wars with the president, with threats to blow up agreement negotiations as their weapon of choice."

HUMAN TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in the last Congress legislation to combat human trafficking was a bipartisan matter. Senators KLOBUCHAR and LEAHY have long been leaders on this issue. But this year—and we could talk about how it got in the bill, many believe it was sleight of hand—there is an abortion provision in this bill that is now before this body.

For well more than 25 years I had the pleasure of serving with Henry Hyde in

the House of Representatives, who was famous for a number of reasons, but one is that he has penned the Hyde language which deals with abortion. In all these 25-plus years, that matter has never put over 1 year at a time. We have never chosen to make that permanent law.

This year Republicans have sought to inject into this consensus bill one of the most controversial issues of the last 40 years—a woman's right to choose.

Don't take my word for it. Leading Republicans acknowledge that abortion politics is extraneous to the bill before us.

Yesterday JOHN CORNYN said: "This bill is being hijacked and being used to debate something that it really doesn't have very much to do about, and that is the subject of abortion."

ORRIN HATCH said: "I can't believe that this Senate has become so political that we would raise that issue at this time on this bill."

The solution is so simple. Take the abortion language out of the bill.

The bill dealing with human trafficking is going to pass. If we don't do it now, we will do it. It is something that is imperative that we accomplish, but it should not be dealt with in relation to abortion. Take the abortion language out of the bill.

The Republican Senators have a choice, to legislate or to hijack the legislation. If they want to get something done, they need to take abortion politics out of this bill. If they want to leave abortion politics in the bill, then the Republicans will only continue this session's record of dysfunction.

This is the second day my friend, the Republican leader, has come to the floor and quoted something I said a few days ago. Every word he quotes is perfect—that is what I said—but here is the context in which I said it. I am an expert on motions to proceed. During the last 6 years I have had to file cloture as a leader here hundreds and hundreds of times—in the last Congress more than 200 times. Virtually all of the cloture motions were filed because Republicans wouldn't let us get on the bill. They simply wouldn't let us get on the bill—every bill—even bills they favored. We would have to spend a couple of days getting it ripe for a vote on cloture, and once that was done, then we had to wait 30 hours. What I said the other day is true, human trafficking is something that needs to get done, and we Democrats are not going to ask you, the Republican leadership, to file abortion language. Get on the bill. And we are on the bill. We could finish this bill in 20 minutes. The only thing that needs to be done is the language relating to abortion should come out of this bill. Abortion and human trafficking have nothing to do with each other.

So my friend the Republican leader can come and quote me any time he wants, and I know he will quote me correctly, but it should be put in the proper context, and that context is

this: We have proven during the first few months of this Congress that on issues that we believe should be debated, we will allow the Senate to get on the bill. We are not going to be stalling, as has been done for the last 6 years, just to kill time. We are on this human trafficking legislation because it is something that needs to be completed, and the only way at this stage it is going to happen is the abortion language must come out of the bill.

Mr. President, would the Chair announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided, and with the majority controlling the first half.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the votes are scheduled today at 2 p.m.; is that right?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

KELSEY SMITH ACT

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about my amendment to the Justice for Victims of Trafficking bill that would make a minor but nevertheless important common-sense update to the current telecommunications law to provide law enforcement with access to information that should and could help locate individuals in life-or-death situations. My amendment—identical to the stand-alone legislation I plan to reintroduce later this month—is aptly named after the young Kansan whose life and bright future was cut short by a senseless act of violence and whose case is the inspiration for why we desperately need to update this law.

Almost 8 years ago. On June 2, 2007, 18-year-old Kansan Kelsey Smith—a lovely girl—was abducted in broad daylight from an Overland Park, KS, parking lot. Kelsey's abduction was captured on the closed circuit camera, therefore leaving little doubt of the emergency situation.