he would allow us to—certainly I would like to concurmate, but I know that is not our purpose in the Senate. He did indicate if there is someone who is deserving of a red flag for reasons that maybe he does not anticipate, we can maybe help in that regard.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

THE SUPREME COURT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, briefly in response to my friend from Kentucky, the distinguished majority whip, I agree with him. We should have a civil debate on the Supreme Court nominee. That is going to happen based on what the President has done to this point.

He met with me in a one-on-one meeting prior to the resignation of Sandra Day O'Connor. He called me the day she resigned. There was a meeting this past Monday in the White House with Senator Ferry, this Senator, and the two leaders of our Judiciary Committee. I thought it was a very good meeting.

What happens regarding a Supreme Court nominee is dependent on the President. From all the indications I have gotten, he does not want a big battle, nor do we. I am hopeful and confident that will be the case.

However, I say directly to my friend from Kentucky, there is no reason we can't make the October 1 date if the President selects someone next week or the week after or the week after that. We can have the FBI working. We can have the Judiciary Committee staff working. The first or second week in September, there can be hearings that last a week. Everyone can ask all the questions they want. Especially if it is a Supreme Court Justice who is one the President thinks, and he indicated that the President thinks, and he indicated that the President thinks, and he indicated

From the very beginning, the President's reelection, we said with two of them, there is no problem, the two Michigan judges. No problem whatever. Just bring them here, we will vote on them, and they can go through.

The reason they were turned down earlier is because of all the problems in the past when the majority at that time—the Republicans sometimes were in the minority; it flipped back and forth; but they would not allow some judges who came from Michigan. It was a procedural problem. Upon the President's reelection, we said: You have those two Michigan judges. So we have spent one-third of the Senate's time on five people, five nominees.

These people could be members of the President's family, but would you spend one-third of the Senate's time on that while leaving important issues dealing with this body alone, ignoring them and rejecting them? I don't think these were not members of the President's family but people who wanted to be judges. What did it amount to when we finished? Out of the five, three have been chosen as judges, two were not. It boiled down to three people. That amounts to two. I don't think that is a good allocutation of our time, and that is a gross understatement.

Not a single day have we spent in this Senate dealing with health care—not a debate on health care, let alone legislation. I don't think we can find a person anywhere in America who would not say, Boy, this problem with health care is significant. Why do they feel that way? Because 45 million Americans have no health insurance? They are not miserly. They have no health insurance? They are not happy and they are better employees when they have health insurance. Why do they feel that way? Because 45 million Americans have no health insurance? They are not happy and they are better employees when they have health insurance. Why do they feel that way? Because 45 million Americans have no health insurance? They are not happy and they are better employees when they have health insurance. Why do they feel that way? Because 45 million Americans have no health insurance? They are not happy and they are better employees when they have health insurance.

Employers know their employees are happier and they are better employees when they have health insurance. Why did these employers not have health insurance for their employees? They are not mean. They are not miserly. They have no health insurance because they do not have to pay it. If employers all over America cannot buy health insurance. Once they buy it, it is canceled if someone gets sick or is in an accident. It is a problem we should be spending time on. Ignoring it does not do the trick.

Evidently, I have said in the Senate, and I will say it again, I met some time ago with all 17 superintendents of the schools of the State of Nevada. We have a wide range of sizes of our school districts. The Clark County school district, Las Vegas, has about 300,000 students. It is one of the largest school districts in all of America. That was
one of the 17 with whom I met. One of the 17 is from Esmeralda County, Goldfield. That whole school district has 88 students. So 300,000 versus 88, and in between we have different size school districts.

All 17 superintendents, without exception, when they walked into that meeting with me—I didn’t ask if they were Democrats, Republicans, or Independents—all 17 told me, as we went around the room, spending about an hour and 45 minutes together, that the Leave No Child Behind Act is expanding public education in Nevada. I didn’t make this up. That is what they told me. It must be a problem. The State of Utah, our neighbor, has dropped out of the program. But we have not spent time in the Senate talking about education—not a single day on education legislation.

Not a single day have we talked about minimum wage. Minimum wage is a very important issue. We have people in Nevada working two and three jobs in the service industry, earning minimum wage, trying to make a go of it. It became so pronounced in Nevada that the State of Nevada, which is known as a pretty conservative State, raised the minimum wage. Now the legislature has to vote again. We are going to put that in our constitution because the Federal Government has not lived up to its expectation.

There are many issues we need to deal with in the Senate. These are issues the majority leader failed to talk about when he was here today. He talked about some of the things we have done, and we have worked closely. Everyone knows I like to have the trains run on time. It is hard for me to get over that. It is difficult for me to want to slow things down. I have lived on this Senate floor for 6 years, and I want as much order as we can have in the Senate. We have worked hard to try to cooperate.

Even though all Democrats did not support the bankruptcy bill, it passed, working through the process. Same with the class action legislation. But we have not spent time in the Senate talking about education—not a single day on education legislation.

My distinguished friend, the majority leader, talked about the budget. In this Senate, right before the vote, I read a letter from the leaders of the Lutheran Church, the Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Church of Jesus Christ, and others. It was their letter, not mine. They said the budget that was about to be passed—and now is law before this country—was an immoral document. These are church leaders. I met recently with the leader of all the bishops of the Catholic faith in my office in Washington. They are very concerned about what is happening to the poor, the oppressed in this country with the budgetary folks. They have addressed that to the White House. This budget passed on trillions of dollars of debt to our children, and at the expense of them the wealthiest in this country did much better in this budget.

We have staggering debt in this country. A press conference was held a couple of days ago by the President and others bragging about the deficit not being so big. The budget the President submitted—now we find the midterm report shows it is going to be the third largest debt in the history of this country, only surpassed by two other Bush budgets. And if he added in the disguise he has in this budget where he does not count the Social Security surplus, the debt would be about $600 billion, the deficit for this year. We have not talked about this issue.

I see in the Senate today my friend from the State of North Dakota. No one, bar none, has spoken more about another problem we do not address in this Senate and the majority leader failed to mention, which is the trade deficit. There was almost a celebration held yesterday regarding the trade deficit this past month which was “only” $55 billion—only $55 billion. I am not sure if the President is going to say “billion” when it should be “million.”

I don’t think we need to brag about the fact we passed CAFTA, which will just make it even bigger. The Catholic Church in Honduras and other places in Central America where CAFTA is going to apply opposed it. Labor unions will oppose it because it is unfair to the working men and women of that part of the world. We should not brag about CAFTA. We should talk about trade policy.

Yes, we passed an energy bill, and I appreciate the limited support we got from my friends on the other side of the aisle. It is better than the House bill, but still it is a very bad bill. It is better than the House bill, no question about it.

We are going to march to conference, and I have agreed to let my folks go to conference on the Energy bill. I hope we can hang on to what we have. Even though this is not as good as I thought it was, it is so much better than the sellout, for lack of a better word, to my folks on the other side of the aisle for the major oil companies. We must still make it through conference where House Republicans remain determined to strip away the good the Senate did and insert giveaways, protections for big energy corporations and chemical companies.

We just finished Homeland Security appropriations. I respect the work of my friend JUDD GREGG and Senator BYRD, the chairman of the subcommittee. We cannot brag about this. I am glad it is finished, but keep in mind, this bill we have in the Senate came with a recommendation from the President to cut spending for first-line responders by about $412 million.

But when my friends in the majority got finished with it, the amount of money taken from first-line responders, in the bill, totaled $492 million less than it was for this past year. We have thousands of police stations, thousands of fire stations filled with police officers and fire fighters, ambulances, medical respond-
time. But this was a subject brought up by the distinguished majority leader, and I felt it was appropriate to answer. I have done the best I can in responding.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I have been advised by my colleague from North Dakota that he would like to follow me, so I ask unanimous consent that the Senator from North Dakota follow me for a period of 20 minutes. And then it is my understanding that the Senator from Ohio is in the queue, the Senator from Ohio being Mr. DeWine. So I ask unanimous consent that be the order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection

Hearing none, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida is recognized.

FEMA

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, to follow up on one of the things we did accomplish in the Senate, passing a bill in the Department of Homeland Defense appropriations bill, I want to call to the attention of the Senate three amendments this Senator from Florida had attached to the bill which were passed. They regard FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency. This, of course, has been extremely important to the Nation, but particularly to my State of Florida, having gone through the experience of four hurricanes last year within a 6-week period.

Originally, FEMA did a very good job. A lot of that was as a result of the lessons we had learned from a decade previously from the monster hurricane of 1992, Hurricane Andrew, when one level of Government was not talking to another level. Those lessons learned were applied. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of those four hurricanes that hit Florida within that 6-week period, FEMA responded, and responded well, working with the State of Florida and the local governments, which in this case for those four hurricanes included most of the counties of Florida. Little did I know, going into August a year ago, I was going to end up visiting almost every emergency operations center in the State of Florida. But that is the fate that befall our State.

But then, in the long run, FEMA started dropping the ball. It was not because they did not have enough money. We appropriated $13.5 billion—that is with a ‘B’—for hurricane relief. Of that $13.5 billion, $8.5 billion went to FEMA. It was not that it did not have enough money. But they started sending it to the wrong places. They sent over $30 million to Miami-Dade County, when in fact the hurricane winds never blew in Miami-Dade County.

So one of the amendments has to do with them being required, under law, to report back to the committee in the Senate and the committee in the House on all of the changes they have made in response to the recent inspector general’s report that named all of these deficiencies in FEMA. One of them was sending millions of dollars into a county where the hurricane winds did not blow.

Another example was they paid for over 300 funerals, but the number of deaths directly attributable or even indirectly attributable to the hurricane was about 125. Why are we paying for that?

Over and over—I cannot tell you how many county commissioners and mayors were calling us, pleading: Why won’t FEMA reimburse us for the debris removal? Over and over we had people saying: FEMA is not sending us any relief.

What is the purpose of FEMA? It is to help people when they are in a time of need and it is authorized under law. Now, do you know what the most recent one is? It is exactly the reverse. Just a month ago, FEMA sent out $27 million in payments to people; and now, as of 2 weeks ago, it is demanding the people send it back. You had this inconsistency. Is this what you would do?

Well, thank goodness the Governmental Affairs Committee of the Senate, at my request, had an investigation and a hearing. They afforded the senior Senator from Florida to be the leadoff witness. Of course, I chronicled a number of these instances.

So we attached to the legislation that passed last night—the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill—amendments that will require FEMA to report back to these committees on the changes that have been made in response to these deficiencies that were noticed by the Inspector General’s report.

But we also put on an amendment that will require FEMA to issue consistent and uniform guidelines for the local governments regarding their reimbursement for hurricane debris removal. This was what was so frustrating to our local governments because in one county FEMA would reimburse the local government for the debris removal and in another county it would not. You had this inconsistency. So in this instance, with a heart of the executive branch, it is our responsibility to make it. I am happy to say we passed this on this bill.

The third amendment was just a commonsense amendment. Do you know what happened? Last year, they were hiring inspectors to go into homes. The inspector general’s report pointed out that those inspectors did not have very much training. Therefore, they were just writing checks left and right, not knowing what they were doing. For example, a reimbursement for a demolished house and all the accouterments and complete furnishings, but, in fact, that house did not have any furnishings. If the inspector had asked, FEMA would have known. Well, that is going to be dealt with, with the amendment, with them coming back and reporting on the inspector general’s report.

But do you know what else happened? FEMA allowed inspectors to go in, examine a house, and make a determination. But, lo and behold, they then came back, and those inspectors would not have assessed base- ment prices, when the homeowner was desperate for cash, at below fair market value. The inspector was profiting as a result of the inspector having been hired, representing the U.S. Government, FEMA, to go in there and help the people, and then coming around and taking advantage of the people in their depleted condition.

So we added an amendment, last night, that is going to prohibit those inspectors from ever going into a house and then having that inspector come back and say, ‘Well, now you owe me $300,000 for that basement—’ It is a commonsense amendment.

I want to call to the attention of the Senator from Ohio that this is an amendment that was filed, if there is a competing legislation that has been filed in the Senate.

It is legislation that was referred to our Senate Commerce Committee, legislation that would require the National Weather Service to take their Web site off the Internet, under the legislation filed, if there is a competing weather service offered by a commercial entity.

In this particular legislation, it is a commercial entity in the State of the Senator who offered the legislation called AccuWeather. What those people in the Florida EOC wanted me to know was that AccuWeather, on Saturday before the hurricane hit on Sunday, had predicted it was going up to New Orleans or Mississippi, whereas the National Weather Service, through the National Hurricane Center, had that track coming straight to an area between Pensacola and Ft. Walton Beach, exactly the track where the hurricane hit.

If we had not had the National Weather Service accuracy available to