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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York.

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

As we come into Your presence today, O Lord, we, like Isaiah of old, need to be cleansed from our sinfulness. Forgive us for our failures and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Today, use our lawmakers so that their actions will help provide for the security and well-being of all people. Sustain our Senators with the protection of Your providence and give them Your peace. Give them also a spirit of unity and the wisdom to have respect one for the other.

Lord, thank You for the redemption You provide for Your people. Holy and awesome is Your Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND 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. INOUE).

The assistant bill clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 14, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable

KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, a Senator from the State of New York, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND 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. REID. Madam President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in morning business for 1 hour. The Republicans will control the first half and the majority will control the final half. Following morning business, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.J. Res. 66, which is now a resolution regarding Burma sanctions and the legislative vehicle for additional FEMA funding. We expect to be in consideration of this legislation today. We also hope to consider the FAA and highway extension, which was received from the House yesterday. Senators will be notified when votes are scheduled.

FEMA VICTIMS

Mr. REID. Madam President, the House sent us a package, and I appreciate that very much. It funds the highway bill for 6 months, and it funds the FEMA bill for 4 months. That is terrific. We should move to this as quickly as we can; however, we are told it is going to be held up by the Republicans. If someone wants to have a vote on an amendment as it relates to this, I will be happy to discuss this with the Republican leader and see if we can work something out. In the instance I am talking about, however, the Sen-

ator said he doesn't want to vote; he just wants to hold up the bill. He said if we put in what we got from the House and stuck his provision in that, then he would be happy. Well, I guess anyone would. It is a pretty good way to legislate around here—just be a dictator and say: Either take this or leave it. That isn't the way things work around here. We have to have votes on issues to find out how people feel.

I am convinced his issue would lose overwhelmingly, but he is holding up this legislation, and we are in a position now legislatively that I can't get to this bill. We cannot get to this bill prior to Friday, when the FAA expires. So it is unfortunate that is the position we are in. One Senator is holding this up, and what it will do is—the highway bill does not expire on Friday; FAA does. But they are a package. If this continues, we will have about 80,000 people out of work by Saturday, 4,000 who work for the FAA and about 70,000 or 75,000 who are working on airport construction jobs. In Las Vegas, for example, there is a new tower being built because of McCarran Field being overwhelmed—the old tower can't handle things well—and those people will be laid off. That is the way it is all over the country. That is very unfortunate.

I really appreciate, Madam President, and I have tried to say individually—I have been to each Republican Senator—the Senators who have voted to help us move forward on funding for FEMA, I really appreciate it. As you know, we have a majority, but it is not a huge majority, and to get things done on issues that are specialized, we need seven Republicans, and we have eight Republicans in this instance who helped us pass this legislation. All the Democratic Senators voted for this, and we got those Republicans. This allows us now to fund FEMA.

I have told my friends on the Republican side of the aisle, if it is something that—if they want to change the

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numbers around, let's have a discussion on that. But right now, people are desperate.

Last night around 6 or 6:30, I spoke to the man who is in charge of FEMA, and he said we are spending money every day on Lee and on Irene. These are not a couple of women; one is a tropical storm, and the other is a hurricane. They are not spending money other places. Why? Because they don't have the money.

As the Presiding Officer knows, there are people in her State who have lost their homes. This is all up and down the coast, from the coast of Florida up to Maine, and even places inward. As we talked about yesterday, some of the very severe damage was not on the coastline but, for example, in the State of Vermont, the worst storm likely they have ever had, and those people are trying to get from one place to the next, but they have scores of bridges that are inoperable. And that money—what money they have left in FEMA—will run out I think he said on the 25th. If things keep going the way they are, on the 25th of this month, they will be out of money—no money.

So we need to get this done. Procedurally, we are on this, and I can't move to the highway bill and the FAA bill. And, I repeat, the FAA bill expires. So I hope we can have something worked out with this Senator so we can get this bill done.

The disasters facing this country are untoward. Forty-eight States have already had emergency declarations. Some States have had multiple emergency declarations. Only two States—West Virginia and Michigan—have not had emergency declarations. We have had in the State of Texas, as an example, 20,000 fires since the first of the year; on Sunday alone, 19 fires. Millions of acres have burned, and 2,000 homes have burned to the ground. That is what FEMA is all about.

FEMA is an organization that is relatively new, but as a country we have been helping people who have experienced disasters since we have been a country.

In the early 1800s, there was a big fire in the State of New Hampshire. I believe the date was 1813. The Federal Government stepped in to help with the rebuilding there. That is the way it should be. That is what our country is all about. I am sorry, Madam President, it was 1803. In 1803, the Federal Government played a role in rebuilding after a calamity in New Hampshire. Congress passed legislation that year to help New Hampshire recover from the devastating fire they had.

FEMA was established in 1979. To this point, it appears this could very likely be the worst disaster year in the history of the country. Irene alone is one of the five worst disasters monetarily we have had in this country.

So I hope my Republican colleagues will work with us and help us move these things along. It is important that we do that. It is important that we do

that as quickly as we can so that people in Joplin, MO, and other places in the country that have been devastated can receive the help they deserve from the Federal Government.

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, 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 controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half and the majority controlling the final half.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1549, H.R. 2832, AND H.R. 2887

Mr. REID. Madam President, there are three bills at the desk due for a second reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bills by title for the second time en bloc.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1549) to provide tax relief for American workers and businesses, to put workers back on the job while rebuilding and modernizing America, and to provide pathways back to work for Americans looking for jobs.

A bill (H.R. 2832) to extend the Generalized System of Preferences, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 2887) to provide an extension of surface and air transportation programs, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I would object to any further proceedings with respect to these three bills.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard. The bills will be placed on the calendar.

The Senator from Nebraska.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. JOHANNIS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to engage in a colloquy with my Republican colleagues—Senators ROBERTS, PORTMAN, HOEVEN, BLUNT, and ISAKSON—and in the event the minority leader does appear to offer comments, that we interrupt our colloquy for the minority leader to speak.

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

TRADE AGREEMENTS

Mr. JOHANNIS. Madam President, I rise today with my colleagues to talk about trade and the importance of trade and specifically to talk about three pending trade agreements. And

when I say "pending," man alive, am I emphasizing "pending." These agreements have been around a very long time. And I am referring to Korea, Panama, and Colombia.

We all know the benefits of trade in the United States. In Nebraska, my home State, more than 19,000 jobs and more than \$5.5 billion in revenue were directly tied to exports last year.

In trade discussions, we often hear about the need to level the playing field. Well, these agreements do exactly that. They eliminate tariffs and a whole host of other barriers on most agricultural products, including products that are important to my State: beef, corn, soybeans, and pork. No doubt about it, they increase the economic opportunities for Nebraska farmers and ranchers, for businesses and for workers.

Well, for 3 years, we have heard the President say the right thing. In fact, every time he would say something about this, I thought, finally, the trade agreements are going to bust loose and we are going to have an opportunity to vote on them.

He said in last year's State of the Union:

If America sits on the sidelines while other Nations sign trade deals, we will lose the chance to create jobs on our shores.

Then again in May, the President called for a "robust, forward-looking trade agenda that emphasizes exports and domestic job growth."

Just last week, the President noted that now is the time. He said, of "a series of trade agreements that would make it easier for American companies to sell their products in Panama, Colombia and South Korea," now is the time. If now is the time, why is the administration continuing to fail to act? It has been 1,538 days since the Korea agreement was signed. It has been 1,540 days since the Panama agreement was signed. It has been 1,758 days since we completed negotiations with Colombia.

As I said, I have colleagues with me today who are in a much better position than I would be to explain the positive impacts of these trade agreements. I am going to ask that Senator ROBERTS speak first, Senator PORTMAN, Senator HOEVEN, Senator BLUNT, and Senator ISAKSON. It is my hope that if there is time permitting, I will wrap up.

I ask Senator ROBERTS, as former chairman of the House Agriculture subcommittee and ranking member of the Senate Agriculture Committee today, how important are these agreements to agriculture and job creation in the United States?

Mr. ROBERTS. Madam President, I thank my colleague and dear friend from Nebraska for the question.

In the end, the biggest consequence for inaction that is now facing our Nation, our biggest challenge, is jobs. In regards to his question, the three pending trade agreements add up to \$13 billion in additional exports and an estimated 250,000 jobs. From the agricultural perspective, the three pending