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Senate

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.

Immortal God, You are the meaning and mystery of all that is, was, and is to be. Thank You for Your sustaining love and for the opportunities to learn from each other. Thank You for the challenges and difficulties You use to test and refine us.

Lord, give our lawmakers the wisdom to trust the unfolding of Your providence. May they embrace a humility that seeks first to understand, instead of striving first to be understood. Deliver them from a false patriotism that would render unto Caesar what belongs to You. Guide them with Your powerful hand until the potentates of this world acknowledge Your sovereignty and might.

We pray in Your sacred 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 MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). The Democratic leader is recognized.

CHEMICAL WEAPONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday marked the 100th anniversary of a heinous and violent event that has tragically changed the world. On April 21, 1915, near the beginning of World War I,

the German Army introduced to the world large-scale chemical weapons. That gas swept the battlefield. People died and suffered enduring pain, and those who survived, with rare exception, suffered the rest of their lives.

The Kaiser's army released tons of chlorine gas, nearly devastating the Allied line in Belgium. Europe would never be the same. The world would never be the same.

The use of poisonous gas proliferated during World War I, bringing death and devastation to members of the military and civilians. Following World War I, nations joined to support the Geneva Protocol of 1925, declaring that chemical weapons were so barbaric, so evil that they should be prohibited from use.

The use of chemical weapons has continued. The world will never forget the atrocities perpetrated by Hitler during World War II, as Nazi Germany used chemicals in the genocide of millions of Jews. During the Nazi regime, at the beginning of it, five men—one name started with S, one started with A, one started with R, I, and N—invented sarin gas. The world will not forget the atrocities perpetrated by the Hitler regime during World War II as Nazi Germany used chemicals in the genocide of millions—millions—of Jews.

The Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s was another terrible instance of lethal gasses being deployed as a tool of warfare. In 1988, Saddam Hussein unleashed a chemical arsenal on his own people, killing thousands of Kurds. Those pictures are available to see. The people are indiscriminately lying there—old men, old women, middle aged people, and babies. The world witnessed these events in horror and decided international action was absolutely necessary again. In 1992, the Chemical Weapons Convention was adopted in Geneva. The Chemical Weapons Convention outlaws the production, stockpile, and use of chemical weapons and requires their destruction. I voted for

that ratification with pleasure. I voted for ratification—which was ratified here in the Senate—of the convention to do something more about these chemical weapons.

But in spite of other efforts, the use of chemical weapons endures. One hundred years have passed since that fateful date in Belgium, and the world has yet to end the evil of those poisons. Today, Bashar al-Assad and his regime and forces loyal to him in Syria are responsible for horrific violence that violates basic decency. It violates international laws of war and has shocked the global conscience.

It is no secret that Assad has repeatedly used chemical weapons against the Syrian people and the country over which he dictates. Even after Syria was compelled to accede to the convention—the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013—there is clear evidence that Assad has continued to reign terror over his own people by using barrel bombs filled with chlorine to indiscriminately wreak havoc.

We are reminded of this all the time. I do not usually watch “60 Minutes.” It is a good program, but I usually have other things to do. But I watched because of the promotion on Sunday evening about something they were going to do on “60 Minutes.” They had graphic pictures that had never been shown before of what this evil person who runs this country of Syria did to his own people.

Sadly, in addition to the use of chemical weapons, the Assad regime has carried out all manner of atrocities throughout the course of the 4-year civil war in Syria. As we speak, about 400,000 Syrians have been killed. He is responsible for the vast majority of those deaths. That does not take into consideration the millions of people who have been displaced.

The regime has committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including starvation, systematic murder, torture, rape, sexual violence and

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



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enforced disappearance. If there were ever, ever something that is evil, bad, wrong, it is what he has done. The action of the Assad regime has resulted in the deaths—as I indicated—of countless innocent civilians and has sewn discord and disarray across the regime.

Yet Assad has repeatedly lied to the world about using chemical weapons. He loves to get on these shows. The U.S. journalists go over there, and he sits there before us talking all of these lies about what he has not done. There are dead people—hundreds of thousands of them there. There are barrel bombs, cluster bombs. He targets civilians. He starves them, demonstrating again and again what a terrible person he is and someone who cannot be believed about anything he says.

I am going to submit a Senate resolution condemning the actions of the Assad regime and its military forces for these crimes they have carried out against humanity. This legislation will express the Senate support for the referral of these evil acts that Assad has perpetrated and that have also been perpetrated by other Syrian officials and of course by the military leaders to an appropriate international tribunal.

Also, I have to say, it turns my stomach to hear people talk about making a peace deal in Syria and having Assad be a part of that deal. How could we do that? This resolution will make clear the Senate's opposition to any role for Bashar al-Assad in any final settlement of that civil war. I am confident my Senate colleagues will join me in condemning the Assad regime and its unthinkable campaign of evil against its own people.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we will have a busy day of voting today. Senators should expect two rollcall votes at approximately 10:45 a.m. this morning and up to six rollcall votes starting at 2 p.m. to finish the antitrafficking bill. I filed cloture on the Lynch nomination last night, and under the regular order, that cloture vote would occur 1 hour after the Senate convenes tomorrow.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1035

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1035) to extend authority relating to roving surveillance, access to business records, and individual terrorists as agents of foreign powers under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION AND LYNCH NOMINATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, help is finally on the way for the thousands of enslaved victims who suffer unspeakable abuse in the shadows. These victims often have nowhere safe to sleep. They often have no safe place to turn to. And if they do try to escape, many risk being treated by the justice system like criminals instead of the victims they truly are.

These victims deserve the help the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act would provide. It is a human rights bill that victims groups and advocates have called “the most comprehensive and thoughtful piece of anti-trafficking legislation currently pending” and one that provides unprecedented support to domestic victims of trafficking, who are all too often invisible and underserved.

We are relieved we can finally say that we will pass it today and that the Senate won't violate longstanding bipartisan Hyde precedent in doing so. But let me be as clear as possible. There was never a logically consistent rationale for the filibuster that held up this bill, and the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service explicitly backed up what Republicans have long said when it confirmed that there are no private funds in this bill.

Thankfully, the filibuster is at an end. Today is a new day. Today, we will finally vote to deliver much needed resources for the victims of modern slavery, with Hyde essentially applying to all funds used for health and medical services, just as it was in the original bill. This is nothing new; it is simply a reaffirmation of the status quo.

We know that today's outcome would not have been possible without the Herculean efforts of my colleague Senator CORNYN. He was absolutely determined to see justice for victims, and we really cannot thank him enough. He negotiated across the aisle in good faith. He never gave up, not even in the bleakest hour. And today, the real focus of all our efforts—the victims of trafficking and modern slavery—can see that help is finally on the way.

We thank Senator CORNYN. We thank his negotiating partners from both parties. We thank Chairman GRASSLEY for

his superb work on this important bill in the Judiciary Committee as well. We look forward to this bill's passage in the House and its signature by the President.

Mr. President, once the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act passes in the Senate, we will turn to consideration of the President's nominee to be Attorney General. That is just what I pledged we would do, and that is what we will do.

TRADE PROMOTION AUTHORITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, I believe we are going to be hearing from the chairman of the Finance Committee shortly. Senator HATCH will be on the floor to discuss bipartisan trade promotion authority legislation which is important because we know that trade is the key to supporting high-quality American jobs and exporting more of the things American workers make and exporting more of the things American farmers grow.

Congress is working again, and this bipartisan bill is another sign of that. No legislation will ever be perfect, but Chairman HATCH and Ranking Member WYDEN, along with Chairman RYAN in the House, put together an agreement of which we can all be proud. It protects and enhances Congress's role in the trade-negotiating process, while making sure Presidents of either party will have the ability to negotiate good agreements that can increase growth in our American economy and support many high-quality American jobs. They are marking up that bill today. I wish them the best of luck. We look forward to having it on the floor in the very near future.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 178, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 178) to provide justice for the victims of trafficking.

Pending:

McConnell (for Cornyn) amendment No. 1120, to strengthen the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act by incorporating additional bipartisan amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wish to say very briefly—I know the distinguished chairman of the Finance Committee is on the floor to speak on an important matter—I would like to express my gratitude to the majority leader for his determination to see this