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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 PRESIDENT pro tempore. Our visiting Chaplain this day is the Reverend Ralph E. Williamson, senior pastor of First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Las Vegas, NV. He will lead us in prayer.

The guest Chaplain offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Most gracious Master and our God, who has safely brought us to another day, grant these elected men and women in the United States Senate wisdom and Your divine guidance as they seek to take care of the business of this Nation. May Your invisible presence watch over and refresh their minds, encourage their thoughts, and invigorate their spirits to find the peaceful solutions and excellence for which they were elected. Allow every moment to serve as an opportunity to resolve their differences and move our great Nation forward.

We pray in the Name of God, the Creator and Sustainer of us all. 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 PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

LYNCH NOMINATION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING LEGISLATION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, today we will be considering the Presi-

dent's nominee for Attorney General, Loretta Lynch. Last month I said the Senate would consider this nominee as soon as we passed an all-important antislavery bill, and today we will consider the nominee. We could not have been more pleased to see the legislation, the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act pass by an overwhelming majority of 99 to 0, yesterday.

Senator CORNYN and the entire Republican conference made this anti-slavery bill a priority because the suffering of these victims is simply unconscionable. As the new majority, we decided these victims had waited long enough. We wanted to make it an early legislative priority. It was time to act and finally to give the victims of modern slavery the help and hope they have long waited for.

Now, we can finally say that help is on the way. Victims, advocates, and all the Members of this body who negotiated in good faith, and Senator CORNYN in particular, who never gave up, should take heart in yesterday's outcome. I would urge the House and the President to enact this bill quickly.

TRADE PROMOTION AUTHORITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, last night we saw the latest example of committees getting back to work in a new Congress—getting back to work for the American people. The Finance Committee passed an important bipartisan bill, trade promotion authority, with broad support from both parties, 20 to 6—20 to 6. The chairman and ranking member of that committee, Senator HATCH and Senator WYDEN, worked hard to achieve the result we saw last night.

Along with Chairman RYAN in the House, they put together an agreement that reflects the kind of honest compromise they can take pride in. It protects and enhances the role of Congress in the trade negotiating process, while ensuring that Presidents of either

party—and I would remind our colleagues that this is a 6-year trade promotion authority bill. It will give to the next President the opportunity to negotiate additional trade agreements and send them to Congress for approval.

These agreements can boost our economy and support more high-quality American jobs. Now, this bipartisan bill will move to the Senate floor. It is my hope to pass it during the current work period.

IRAN NUCLEAR AGREEMENT REVIEW ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on the topic of committees getting back to work in the new Congress, we witnessed more evidence of that last week when the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved the bipartisan Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. It is a bipartisan bill with many Republican and Democratic co-sponsors. It will ensure the American people are given a voice on one of the most important issues of our time.

Chairman CORKER worked closely with Members of both parties both to craft a compromise bill and to advance it. Many have admired not just his hard work on this issue but his determination as well. After all, who would have imagined that the White House, after trying to kill this bipartisan bill for months, would find itself forced to pull a near-total about-face. It is no wonder, though, because the core principle that has always underlined the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act—that Congress and the American people deserve a say in any nuclear deal that the President tries to cut with Iran—is more than just common sense. It is really a no-brainer.

After all, preventing the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism from gaining access to nuclear weapons should be the goal of every Senator and every American, regardless of party. It

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



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is not a partisan issue. It is one of the greatest challenges to regional stability, and the stakes are very high.

Iran's support of Hezbollah, the Assad regime, Shia militias in Iraq, and the Houthi insurgents in Yemen, coupled with its determination to expand not just its nuclear capabilities but also its ballistic missile and conventional military capabilities, represents an aggressive effort to expand the Iranian sphere of influence throughout the greater Middle East.

Iran's belligerent quest for nuclear weapons capabilities, its fierce determination to undermine America's standing in the region, and its violent pursuit of regional hegemony represent a grave, grave threat—not just to nearby nations in the Middle East, not just to our own country, but for that matter to the entire world. So the stakes are indeed high. As we know, President Obama has been engaged in negotiations with the Iranians for some time now. Initially, we were led to believe that the point of these negotiations was to prevent—prevent—Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

But the administration's focus appears to have shifted from reaching an agreement that would end Iran's nuclear program to reaching an agreement for agreement's sake. That is the only way to interpret the interim agreement we saw recently. It would effectively bestow an international blessing for Iran to become a nuclear threshold state forever—forever on the edge of obtaining a nuclear weapon.

The direction these negotiations have taken should be very worrying for Americans of every political stripe. What that simply underlines is the need for a measure such as the bipartisan Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act.

Here is what it would do. First, it would require that any final agreement reached with Iran be submitted to Congress for review. Second, it would require that Congress be given time to hold hearings and, ultimately, take a vote to approve or disapprove any Iran agreement before congressional sanctions are lifted.

Third, if a final deal ultimately does go forward, it would require the President to certify back to Congress every 90 days that Iran remains in compliance with the agreement. And if the President is unable to do so, it would empower Congress to rapidly reimpose sanctions. In short, passing this bipartisan bill would give Congress and the American people important tools to assess any agreement reached by the administration before congressional sanctions can be lifted.

Remember, it was due in no small measure to the congressional sanctions offered by Senator MARK KIRK, which passed this Chamber 100 to 0, 4 years ago, that Iran was forced to the negotiating table in the first place. The Obama administration fiercely opposed those bipartisan sanctions back then, just as it opposed the bipartisan bill

before us soon until very recently. But those sanctions have been so effective that even the administration has had to embrace them. Congress was right then, and Congress is right now.

We should not be negotiating away the leverage previous sanctions have given our country for a bad deal especially agreed to for agreement's sake. Look, no piece of legislation is perfect. Senators who would like to see this bill strengthened, as I would, will have that chance during a robust amendment process that we will soon have right here on this floor. This bill will be open for amendment. Those who seek to improve it will have an opportunity to do that. But what we do know is that this bipartisan bill is underlined by a very solid principle and a lot of hard work. It represents a real opportunity to give the American people more of a say on this important issue. We look forward to a vigorous debate on it next week.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

WELCOMING THE GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. REID. Mr. President, this morning I would like to extend a warm welcome to the Reverend Dr. Ralph Williamson, of Las Vegas, NV, who opened the Senate today with such a beautiful prayer. For a dozen years, Dr. Williamson has served as senior pastor at the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in North Las Vegas.

During that time, Reverend Williamson has helped shepherd the First African American Episcopal Church through an expansion that includes a beautiful new sanctuary. It is brand new. He is a devoted pastor, and he is beloved by a growing congregation, which includes Senator CORY BOOKER's mother.

CORY's mom and aunt live in Las Vegas. It was there that his good dad died. I had the opportunity to meet his father before he passed away. They are so proud of their son, CORY—as well they should be—as they are proud of having worshiped in this church.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Reverend Williamson has heeded this admonition, doing good for the members of his flock and the people of all southern Nevada. Through Reverend Williamson's leadership, the First African American Episcopal Church has become a source of faith and vital support for the community. Reverend Williamson's tireless efforts have produced programs for youth, seniors, and the underprivileged. He has pioneered food banks, summer lunch programs, tutoring programs, and health min-

istries. Just about everything that deals with helping people, he has done it.

I appreciate his joining us today. I did not have the chance to tell him. We met earlier today. We had a "Welcome to Washington" with 60 or 70 people today. He gave the presentation to them and offered a prayer for those assembled. It was very warm and nice. But what I did not get a chance to tell him is that I believe the first leader of the flock, of this church in southern Nevada, was a man by the name of Albert Dunn. He was responsible for starting this first congregation. He was my friend, Reverend Dunn. He was a very, very devoutly religious man. To show you how far he went to help people in the community, this was a conversation with his wife one day. She said: "You know, I wish you had talked to Reverend Dunn, because, oftentimes, we would get up in the morning and he had given away all the food to people who needed it."

So I have a warm remembrance of this church and Reverend Dunn.

Dr. Williamson, thank you very much for your leadership. I appreciate it very much.

IRAN LEGISLATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I look forward to returning to the debate on the situation dealing with Iran. It is a very difficult issue. It is so important for the country and the world.

I hope there can be some further negotiations when they finish these negotiations in June, at least something that will be received with popularity in the Senate. Democrats and Republicans will say: That is great. We are finally able to get something done. Iran now can no longer use nuclear weapons because we have stopped them from doing so. I hope we arrive at that point, but we are not there yet. I wish so fervently that the negotiators can arrive at some agreement in the next couple of months.

We are going to move to this bill as soon as we can. I hope we can do it sooner rather than later.

The debate on these amendments that the Republican leader talked about are very significant. As the Republican leader said, there should be amendments offered. If people think they can improve the bill, there can be amendments offered. If people think there is stuff in the bill they simply don't like and they don't like all of this process, let them offer an amendment. We need robust debate. We have to make sure that attention is focused on this issue and nothing else.

I look forward to seeing what I can work out with my friend, the senior Senator from Kentucky, the majority leader of the Senate, to see when we can move to this bill.

LYNCH NOMINATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the Wall Street Journal had a great editorial