



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 161

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, MAY 11, 2015

No. 71

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May 12, 2015, at 12 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, MAY 11, 2015

The Senate met at 3 p.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.

Sovereign Lord, You are our light and salvation so we will not fear. You are the strength of our lives so we will be unafraid. Lord, we are grateful for Your steadfast love and unchanging mercy. Each day You provide us with Your power and compassion.

Sustain our lawmakers today, strengthening them in their challenging work of striving to find creative ways to solve the problems of our time. Inspire them to trust You without wavering, acknowledging You in all they do. Lord, be gracious to them, guiding them with Your wisdom as You gladden their spirits with Your eternal presence.

Send down Heaven's peace into all our hearts.

We pray in Your merciful 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

THE SENATE AT WORK

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I took a trip up to Boston this weekend to address the Kennedy Institute. It was really a unique experience.

I was there in a full-scale representation of the Senate Chamber to discuss how the real Senate is beginning to get back to work. I explained how committees are working again so Senators can have more of a stake in the legislative process. I explained how we are allowing more open floor debate and more amendment opportunities so Senators can better represent the voices of their constituents. And I explained how we are getting the fundamentals back on track, such as passing a budget.

This doesn't mean we have ironed out all the Senate's challenges. It doesn't mean a new era of good feelings beckons just around the corner. And it doesn't mean an exertion of will won't be necessary every now and then. But it does mean that we are beginning to open the Senate back up, and in a way that will make shared achievement more likely.

Recall just last week, when we overwhelmingly passed a bill to give the

American people more of a say in President Obama's negotiations with Iran. Although we weren't able to consider nearly the number of amendments I would have liked to have seen considered to strengthen the bill, the legislation did provide for congressional oversight of any comprehensive agreement.

The White House had been threatening to veto that bill, but it passed with the bipartisan support of 98 percent of Senators anyway.

Later this afternoon, we will take up another Iran-related measure that I hope we will pass with similar bipartisan enthusiasm.

The resolution of the junior Senator from Idaho is simple. It calls on the administration to use the tools it has in pursuit of what should be a bipartisan goal: securing the release of American citizens being held as hostages by the regime in Iran.

One of those Americans, Saeed Abedini, has reportedly been held prisoner for what would appear to be the supposed crime of attempting to build and operate an orphanage—the supposed crime of building and operating an orphanage.

Beaten, denied access to medical care, and locked away in solitary confinement—that is apparently how the Iranian regime deals with those who dare to show love and compassion to others. No American should find this acceptable, just as no American should find it acceptable to imprison unjustly a reporter or a grandson coming to see his grandmother.

I think we can all agree that, at the very least, the American people should

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S2743

not be rewarding Iran for its disgraceful human rights abuses and that we should not be granting Iran access to the funding it desires to further its nuclear weapons program and terrorist proxies while this exploitation continues.

So I call on every Senator to join us in standing up for human rights. Let's pass Senator RISCH's legislation later this afternoon.

I mentioned earlier that committees are beginning to get back to work in the new Senate. We have seen a lot of bipartisan committee action in recent weeks. One standout achievement was the Finance Committee's overwhelming passage of bipartisan trade legislation, 20 to 6. It is incredibly important for American workers that we pass this bill. Without it, foreign countries will continue to be able to discriminate against American products and American produce, while we have some of the lowest duties in the world.

We need strong and fair trade legislation that expands Congress's oversight over the administration and sets clear rules and standards for its trade negotiators. That is the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act in a nutshell.

Yet some talk about preventing the Senate from even debating the bill. I would tell you, I think this would be a big mistake. The Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act reported by the Finance Committee is already a strong bill, and we will have an amendment process on the floor that will allow Members the opportunity to advance their priorities. Voting to proceed to a bill is a vote that says this is worthy of debate—worthy of debate. Well, certainly this bill is indeed worthy of debate, supported by the President of the United States.

So I commend Senator HATCH, Senator WYDEN, and their colleagues on the Finance Committee for getting us this far. My hope is that we can continue this debate tomorrow.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

MOVING LEGISLATION AND REPUBLICAN PRIORITIES

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I must comment on some of the statements that my friend the Republican leader has made.

We have been able to accomplish a few things during this work period, and the reason we have been able to do so is that we, the minority, have cooperated.

For 4 years, my Republican colleagues in the minority objected to everything we tried to do—everything. I don't mean most everything; I mean everything. That was a plan they had. I have mentioned before and I will

mention again that they decided they would make sure that Obama was not reelected. That failed. And, No. 2, they were going to oppose everything he tried to do, and they have done that overwhelmingly. So it was really hard for 4 years to get things done.

Now, my friend the majority leader can talk all he wants about how much we have gotten done. Look at what we have been able to accomplish. The majority of the measures we have done could have been done before, if Republicans had not objected to them and stopped us from moving to those matters.

So we are going to continue to do everything we can to move measures, in conjunction with my Republican friends, but we shouldn't be hearing a lot of speeches here about how great things are now, because every time that happens I am going to come and tell everybody what has happened for 4 years.

Government is all about priorities. What do we, as Senators, value the most? With only a few days before the Memorial Day recess, I am disturbed and distressed by the Republicans' priorities. For example, the majority leader knows that the Federal highway program expires this month—not next month, this month. He knows that the highway trust fund runs out of money a few weeks later. Why then are Republicans making no serious effort to pass a long-term reauthorization of the Federal highway program?

I can easily answer this question. They do not know how to pay for America's next jobs bill. So with no as the answer, they again do nothing. Another short-term extension—this is one of many—one of many. I think the last I remember, the last my staff brought me up to date—I think it has been 12 or 15 times that it has been extended for short periods of time. This is not good. This is such bad news for every State—every State—because the directors of the departments of transportation can't do anything long term. The only way to have a good program for construction is to be able to look ahead.

As the Senator from Vermont said the other day, Vermont's season to be able to do construction work is very short, and they can't do long-term planning when the money is only going to be available for a few months.

So this is really unfortunate and really too bad. I say again, this could be America's next jobs bill. So it is really too bad.

We also have the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, known as FISA. It expires on June 1. It must be extended and reformed. Last week, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the bulk collection program, as currently constructed, is not authorized under current law—meaning the law is illegal. It would be irresponsible for this Congress to merely reauthorize and not reform. How can we reauthorize something that is illegal? We can't. We shouldn't. Why would anyone agree

to reauthorize a program which our circuit courts deem to be illegal?

My friend the majority leader keeps talking about extending the program for 5½ years. Extending an illegal program for 5½ years? That is not sensible. What should happen is that we should move forward and do something that is needed here; that is, do it all over again.

The House of Representatives is sending us on Wednesday a new FISA bill, one that has been vetted by those people concerned about the rights of our citizens. They have determined that what the House has done is good. They have passed it out of committee 25 to 2. Senator LEAHY has a bill over here that is almost identical to that bill. So I can't understand why we just don't wait until the House sends us that bill and we turn around immediately and give it to the President as passed by the House of Representatives. The President will sign it. He realizes the program has to be changed. We cannot reauthorize a program that is illegal.

So I hope we can move forward on what the House has done. To his credit, Senator LEAHY is not saying: We have to have my bill. He is saying: If we don't do my bill—Senator LEAHY's bill—pass the House bill. That would be good.

This is the only bipartisan, bicameral solution we have today that will end the illegal bulk collection program in its current form and reform and reauthorize key provisions of FISA. Otherwise, I am not the only one, Mr. President. I was told walking over here that the junior Senator from Kentucky is not going to let the extension of FISA take place.

So why don't we just go ahead and get it done now; that is, when the House sends us their bill, say we are going to pass that and send it to the White House for signature.

I hope the majority leader will reassess his priorities and instead choose to protect Americans' civil liberties.

What is the business of the day, Mr. President?

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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