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Senate

The Senate met at 10:15 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.

Sovereign Lord, You are our strong shelter and hiding place. We praise You for Your love and wisdom. Lord, You are too wise to make a mistake, too loving to be unkind, and too powerful for Your providence not to prevail. We are grateful that You have the final word about what happens in our Nation and world, so teach us to patiently wait for Your will to be done. Guide our lawmakers, giving them a clear comprehension of Your plans for our Nation. As they depend upon Your wisdom, fill them with the courage to accomplish those things that will unite rather than divide us. Inspire us all to experience the constancy of Your presence.

We pray in Your Holy 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOOD LABELING BILL

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as we all know, the President will be making an announcement this morning on the Supreme Court. I will have more to say about that later this morning.

As for the legislation currently before the Senate, the Senate will resume its consideration of bipartisan legislation aimed at protecting middle-class families from unfair higher food prices. It is a commonsense solution founded on science-based standards. Let's advance it together. If colleagues have other ideas on the issue, I would again encourage them to work with the bill managers to process any alternative solutions they may have.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2686

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

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2686) to clarify the treatment of two or more employers as joint employers under the National Labor Relations Act.

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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The minority leader is recognized.

PRESIDENT'S NOMINEE TO THE SUPREME COURT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in just a few minutes President Obama will officially announce his nominee to the U.S. Supreme Court. In considering a nomination to the highest Court in the Nation, the President has said he would adhere to three important principles: First, the nominee must possess

impeccable credentials. That means an outstanding education, critical judicial experience, and an expert understanding of the law. Second, the nominee should have a keen awareness of the judiciary's role. That means understanding the Court's constitutional place in our government, and its limitations; third, and finally, life experience. A qualified Supreme Court Justice is someone with an understanding of the realities that Americans face each and every day.

I have no doubt how hard this must have been for the President. I have no doubt President Obama's nominee will possess these important attributes just outlined. Once President Obama has done his constitutional duty and announced publicly this nominee, it will then fall upon the Senate to provide its advice and consent. For 100 years we have had these hearings in public, going back to during Justice Brandeis' hearing.

The Republican leader has made it clear that he and his caucus have no intention of considering the nominee. It is hard to comprehend but that is what he said, and it appears at this stage, basically, all Republicans have fallen in line with this. I hope President Obama's nomination of an exceptionally qualified and consensus nominee will persuade Senate Republicans to change course. I do hope they will do their constitutional duty and give President Obama's nominee a meeting, a hearing, and a vote. He is doing his job this morning. Republicans should do theirs this morning too.

Mr. President, will the Presiding Officer announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

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



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S1515

NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE
PROGRAM AMENDMENTS ACT OF
2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany S. 764, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany S. 764, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell motion to concur in the House amendment to the bill with McConnell (for Roberts) amendment No. 3450 (to the House amendment to the bill), in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell motion to refer the bill to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 11:45 a.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask unanimous consent that the time be charged equally.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I rise to express my disappointment that we have not yet been able to come to an agreement on the issue of GMO labeling. Senator ROBERTS and I have a long history of friendship and of working together. We have both worked very hard to come to an agreement on an extremely difficult and emotional issue. I thank him for his continual work, and I am forever the optimist that we will get there, even though we are not there yet. We have continued to work, and my team and I have continued to work, to find common ground, all the way until very late last night. If we at this point do not proceed but can have some more time, I believe it is possible for us to come together in a bipartisan solution.

While this debate has been difficult, there are some important areas where Senator ROBERTS and I agree. For instance, Senator ROBERTS and I agree that the science has shown us that biotechnology is safe.

In fact, leading health organizations like the American Medical Association, the National Academy of Sciences, the FDA, and the World Health Organization all say there is no evidence that GMOs aren't safe. We agree that biotechnology is an important tool for farmers and ranchers, particularly as we tackle the challenges of climate change—which, by the way, science also tells us is real. I believe in science,

and I would love if we would all come together around the science on both of these issues.

We have to tackle the need to feed a growing, hungry world. We agree that a 50-State patchwork of labeling laws is not a workable long-term solution. In fact, I don't know any Member on any side of this issue in the Senate who doesn't agree with that, that we have to have a national approach, not 50 different States. But we also know, as we have frequently debated States' rights, the importance of States making decisions, that when we preempt States, whether it is on fuel efficiency standards for automobiles or whether it is on food labeling, the approach has always been to go from 50 different States doing 50 different things to having a national standard and a national approach. As it was with CAFE standards, in which I was very involved, it is important that it work from an industry standpoint. I know it can be done, and it is our job to get to that point.

We also recognize, though, that a growing number of American consumers want to know more about the food they eat, and they have the right to know. They have the right to know what is in their food.

I was very proud of the fact that we came together on the last farm bill to recognize all parts of agriculture. The fastest growing part of agriculture is the organic sector. We gave more opportunities to support the organic sector, the local food movement.

People should have choices in deciding what food they eat, how it is grown, how it is processed, and that is something we have said in national policy that we support through our agricultural policies. Unfortunately, the Senate is poised to vote on a bill that I do not support, that does not fully answer this demand from consumers. Consumers want information about the food they eat, it is as simple as that. In fact, the bill continues the status quo on providing information to consumers. It lists a number of things, many of which are already being done, 1–800 numbers and so on. Look at the back of the pack; it lists things, but they are things that are already being done—not all but many, enough—and then says: We will keep the status quo nationally, but we will preempt the States and citizens around the country from taking individual action. I don't support that. That is not good enough. It doesn't reflect what we do when we are talking about Federal policy. That is one reason I think the approach put forward in the bill is the wrong path.

Unfortunately, we have seen a lot of emotion around this issue on both sides—a lot of emotion. Frankly, there is a lot of confusion about GMOs and their safety, which is why I think this approach is the wrong approach. We should be telling the story, as should farmers, of biotechnology and the importance that it plays in our food production and in food security. We should not be taking action that further ap-

pears to stop consumers from getting the information they want and feeds into the idea that there is something wrong, that there is a reason to hide, because there is not. We should embrace this opportunity to share with the public what is in our food, talk about it, why we use these crops, why they are deemed safe.

That is why, during the last several months of negotiations with Chairman ROBERTS, I offered several proposals that would shed light on this issue and do it in a way that is eminently workable for those involved in the food industry. While those proposals were not ultimately accepted, I still believe we need and can achieve a policy that creates a uniform national system of disclosure for the use of GMO ingredients and do it in a way that has common sense and works for everybody. The national disclosure system needs to provide real options for disclosing information about GMOs that work for both consumers and food companies.

I believe we must create a system that provides certainty as well to our food companies and all of our companies—national, organic, traditional companies. Everyone knows that a 50-State system with 50 different definitions, 50 different laws, and 50 different ways to do packaging doesn't work, so we all have a need to come together and to fix this. I also believe that a system must work for all companies—very small companies, medium-sized companies, and large companies as well.

I believe we must not harm the important work being done by our organic producers. Again, we made great strides in the farm bill, and we need to keep the choices that are in the marketplace now available to consumers and not pass something that will infringe on any of the choices consumers have.

I am disappointed that we have not yet been able to come to a clear consensus on the issue of GMO labeling. I know this issue is contentious. As I said, it is very emotional on all sides. As far as I am concerned, it is time for us to come together on a thoughtful, commonsense approach that is best for consumers, for farmers, for families, and for our country.

We have the most successful agricultural system, food economy in the world. We are the envy of the world. We want to make sure that whatever we do, we maintain that position. But part of who we are in America is a country that believes in people's right to know information and be able to make their own individual choices. I believe there is a way to do that, to make sure we continue to have the strongest, most vibrant, most successful and robust agricultural economy and food economy in the world—we are literally feeding the world—and at the same time be able to provide basic information that American consumers are asking to have provided.

I will not be supporting Senator ROBERTS' amendment. I think this may be