

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

AN ENJOYABLE DIVERSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, no matter what work or occupation one has, it is always good to have a diversion away from their duties of the day.

I am very careful about never speaking for the Republican leader, but I will make an exception today and talk a little bit about my friend the Republican leader.

We both find a diversion during baseball season. We can leave here—it really doesn't matter what time; usually the games are at night—and we can watch the Nationals play baseball. The Republican leader and I have talked about this often—how much we enjoy the games—and we have enjoyed the games much more since this young man from Las Vegas, Bryce Harper, is on the baseball team, the Washington Nationals. He comes from a great family, a working family. His father was an ironworker. They are a close family.

Prior to the Nationals even having a team here—I have been here a long time—I followed the Orioles, and just as a side note, I should mention how happy I am for Peter Angelos, the owner, that fine man, that his team is doing so well this year. They are 7 and 0.

So Senator MCCONNELL and I enjoy baseball season. It gives us an opportunity to focus on things other than what is going on in the Senate.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTINE CATUCCI

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I join with the Republican leader today in honoring Christine Catucci on the occasion, which has already been mentioned, of her 40th anniversary of working for the U.S. Senate.

In any given year, about 2½ million people visit this beautiful building. Bill Dauster, who is here with me and is with me virtually every day, every place I go, was just commenting before the prayer was given how fortunate we are to work in this magnificent building. And as the Republican leader mentioned in his comments about Ms. Catucci, people become starry-eyed looking at this building. We are here all the time, and we may not appreciate it as much as we should every day. It is a beautiful building.

For those of us who are fortunate enough to venture over to the place where she works—down on the first floor is where she spends most of her day, and that is where most of the people come into that floor—you will see a great smile. That smile belongs to her. I first saw that smile many years ago. We had a Senate retreat. She was there to help staff us, and she played a vital role in making sure the retreat worked well. I have always remembered her

from that one experience. She does have a disarming smile, for which we should all be grateful. I know I am.

She has been here for 40 years. The only person who has been here as a Senator longer than Christine is PAT LEAHY from Vermont. She has seniority over everybody except Senator LEAHY.

Her career began in the last year of Gerald Ford's Presidency. She worked as a tour guide, chaperoning people through the Capitol and giving people explanations as to what they were looking at at the time. In 1980 she moved to the Office of the Doorkeeper of the Senate and moved through a number of positions there for 11 years.

In 1991, she arrived at the Senate Appointment Desk, where she has worked for the last 25 years. She is the director, overseeing a staff of nine.

Over the years, she has developed a close relationship with Senators and staff, and she can recount with pleasure the times that Senator Robert Byrd—the legendary Robert Byrd from West Virginia—would invite her and some of her coworkers to have lunch with him in his Capitol office. He didn't eat much, if anything, but he talked all the time, telling stories. I was the recipient of a number of the stories of the late, great Senator Byrd.

The Senate is her family, literally. Her father was a Senate doorkeeper from 1967 to 1977. Her daughter Nichole works in the cloakroom right behind us. That is three generations of Senate staffers.

It was Nichole who summed up everything great about her mother for me when she said: "My mom raised me all by herself and did an amazing job as a single mom while working full-time."

So this is Christine Catucci. It is her work ethic and caring dedication that she has brought to the Senate every day for the last 40 years—four decades. Thank you very much for being a part of our Senate family.

TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNMENT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, throughout his career in the Senate, the senior Senator from Iowa has styled himself as an advocate for transparency in government. A number of years ago he said:

I believe in the principle of open government. Lack of transparency in the public policy process leads to cynicism and distrust of public officials. . . . As a matter of principle, the American people need to be made aware of any action that prevents a matter from being considered by their elected Senators.

He reiterated his beliefs just a few days ago here in this Chamber, and here is what he said last week:

The principle of government transparency is one that does not expire. . . . Open government is good government. And Americans have a right to a government that is accountable to its people.

So Senator GRASSLEY's commitment to transparency is as shallow as the shallowest puddle you could find.

All it took was one phone call, obviously, from the Republican leader for Senator GRASSLEY to abandon any pretense of transparency and shut the American people out of the Supreme Court nomination process—shut them out.

This is the same Senator who once said, "As a matter of principle, the American people need to be made aware of any action that prevents a matter from being considered by their elected Senators."

Nothing that Senator GRASSLEY has done with respect to the Supreme Court vacancy meets his own standard for transparency.

There was no transparency when the Judiciary Committee chairman and his Republican committee members shut Democrats out and met with the Republican leader behind closed doors. There was no transparency when he twisted the arms of his own committee members to sign a loyalty oath, again behind closed doors. There was no transparency when he sought to move a public committee meeting behind closed doors just to avoid talking about the Supreme Court nomination. And there was certainly no transparency on Tuesday—yesterday—when at 8 o'clock in the morning he met downstairs with Judge Merrick Garland in the private Senate Dining Room moments before slipping out the back door to avoid reporters. This is how CNN reported it: "The Iowa Senator left the high-profile but out-of-sight meeting via a backdoor that leads to his private 'hideaway.'"

One television station in Iowa put it this way: "Grassley evaded reporters."

This is the same Senator who once supported cameras in Federal courtrooms, including the Supreme Court. Why? To increase transparency, so he said. But Senator GRASSLEY only wants transparency to apply to others, I guess not to himself. When it comes to transparency, his attitude is strictly: "Do as I say, not as I do."

He won't even apply a degree of that same openness as he blocks a nominee to the highest Court in the land. There will be no transparency if Senator GRASSLEY fails to call an open hearing where Chief Justice Garland can present himself to the American people.

I have had people ask me: Why wouldn't there be a hearing? Well, it is obvious. They are all afraid. The chairman of the Judiciary Committee is afraid that this good man, if the American people see him, will understand why he is a nomination that couldn't be better. They are afraid to allow this man to be seen by the American public. Talking about transparency, there won't be any if the Republican Senators aren't going to be able to even have a vote on the nomination.

All of this that has been going on is not like the Senator GRASSLEY who I have served with for more than three decades. By carrying out the present leader's failed strategy to undermine

this Court, the Senator from Iowa is undermining years of his own hard work in pushing for more open government. All that he has done talking about transparency is gone.

Senator GRASSLEY should take his own medicine and stop retreating behind closed doors with private conversations that shut the American people out of the important confirmation process. If the senior Senator from Iowa truly believes in transparency, he should simply do his job and give Merrick Garland a hearing and a vote.

Mr. President, there appears to be no one seeking the floor. 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.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING THOMAS EATON STAGG, JR.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, I rise in support of designating the Shreveport Federal Building as the "Tom Stagg Federal Building and United States Courthouse." The Honorable Thomas or "Tom" Eaton Stagg, Jr., of Shreveport passed away last June. He was an inspirational figure.

He graduated from Byrd High School in Shreveport and joined the U.S. Army preparing for World War II. He rose to the rank of captain, earning the Combat Infantryman Badge, a Bronze Star for valor, another Bronze Star for meritorious service, the Purple Heart with oak leaf cluster.

At one point, he was saved from death when a German bullet was stopped by a Bible he carried in his pocket. It was as if he was fated to live. After World War II, Tom attended Cambridge and then LSU Law Center and then served in private practice.

Tom's reputation was described as a combination of "intelligence, spirit, patriotism, wisdom and wit" and resulted in his nomination to serve on the Federal bench for the Western District of Louisiana in 1974. He was named chief judge in 1984, a position he

held until 1991. Many testimonials, one of which a close colleague said of Judge Stagg:

Without a doubt he was the finest trial judge I have ever met. Without ever knowing it, he had served as my silent mentor, a role model. . . . To have served the job with Judge Tom Stagg on the federal bench for 12 years is a singular honor. A giant has fallen . . . this remarkable man left a legacy of love of family, of duty and honor and love of this nation, its judicial system and the rule of law.

The colleague continues:

Tom Stagg loved being a federal judge. We will all miss him.

Judge Stagg assumed senior status on the court in 1992, but he didn't retire. He maintained a full caseload, serving on Federal circuit courts of appeals panels. Judge Stagg loved being a judge, but his love for the job also came second after his love for his family. Judge Stagg married the former Mary Margaret O'Brien in 1946 and is survived by her and their two grandchildren, Julie and Margaret Mary.

I yield the floor.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

AMERICA'S SMALL BUSINESS TAX RELIEF ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 636, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 636) to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to permanently extend increased expensing limitations, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell (for Thune/Nelson) amendment No. 3679, in the nature of a substitute.

Thune amendment No. 3680 (to amendment No. 3679), of a perfecting nature.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I wish to speak briefly to the legislation before us, the FAA reauthorization.

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, which I chair, was instrumental in bringing this bill to the floor. Our committee has a long and proud history of bipartisan cooperation on important matters under its jurisdiction. This extends to the bill before us today, the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2016, which I, along

with my colleagues, introduced and marked up in front of our committee.

The legislation before us today includes the most passenger-friendly provisions, the most significant aviation safety reforms, and the most comprehensive aviation security enhancements of any FAA reauthorization in recent history. This bill helps passengers and Americans who use the national airspace for many different transportation needs.

For example, since the last reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration in 2012, the use of drones has increased dramatically. According to its most recent aerospace forecast, the FAA estimates that annual sales of both commercial and hobby unmanned aircraft could be 2.5 million in 2016—a number they estimate may increase to 7 million units annually by 2020. But the FAA has an outdated legislative framework being used to shape the use of this rapidly growing technology for both hobbyists and commercial operators. This is slowing down innovation and advancements in safety. Our bill gives the FAA new authority to enforce safe drone usage. This includes efforts to make sure drone users know and follow basic rules of the sky to avoid dangerous situations.

To support job growth in the aerospace industry, our legislation reforms the process the FAA uses for approving new aircraft designs. Our goal is to shorten the time it takes for U.S. aerospace innovations to go from design boards to international markets while maintaining safety standards.

For the general aviation community, we are also streamlining redtape and adding safety enhancements for small aircraft by including provisions from the Pilot's Bill of Rights 2.

Finally, we increase authorized funding for the Airport Improvement Program, which pays for infrastructure like runways, by \$400 million with existing surplus funds. This allows us to help meet pressing construction needs without raising taxes or fees on the traveling public.

We developed this bill through a robust and open process that allowed every member of the Commerce Committee to help guide the content of this critical aviation legislation. Last year the Commerce Committee held six hearings on topics that helped inform our legislation. At the committee markup last month, we accepted 57 amendments, 34 of which were sponsored by Democrats and 23 of which were sponsored by Republicans.

Since debate began on the bill last week, we have successfully included an additional 19 amendments here on the floor of the Senate. Ten of these amendments are sponsored by Democrats and nine by Republicans.

This bill deserves the Senate's support. I urge Members to remember all of the important improvements this legislation puts in place for aviation security, consumer protection efforts, American innovation, safety, and job