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Senate

The Senate met at 9:45 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Loving God, Your providence guides our going out and coming in, and we praise Your great Name.

Today, help our lawmakers to exercise that cool judgment that is worth far more than a thousand hasty words. Remind them that soft answers turn away anger and that humility precedes honor. As they work to do what is best for our Nation and world, use their lips to provide more light than heat, as their words build up instead of tearing down. May the words of their mouths and the meditations of their hearts glorify You.

And, Lord, bless the faithful members of our fall page class as they prepare to leave us.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, January 28, 2016.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable DEAN HELLER, a Senator from the State of Nevada, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mr. HELLER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the last time a broad energy bill was signed into law was back in 2007. It may as well have been a lifetime ago as far as America's energy situation is concerned. While we were once living in an era of energy scarcity, we are now living in an era of higher energy production and lower technology costs. It is change that represents many opportunities but also challenges—aging infrastructure, bureaucratic hurdles, outdated policies, and needless redtape. These are the kinds of challenges we will need to address if we want to support America's rise as one of the world's preeminent energy superpowers and if we want to support the accompanying potential for jobs, for growth, and for increased energy independence. That is why the Senate is considering the Energy Policy Modernization Act. It is broad, bipartisan legislation that will modernize our energy policies to keep pace with a changing world. It will help Americans produce more energy. It will help Americans pay less for energy. It will help Americans save energy.

This bipartisan bill builds on technological progress in order to strengthen and sustain America's energy advances while protecting our environment at the same time, all without raising

taxes or adding to the deficit. It is the latest reminder of what is possible with cooperation in this Senate.

A huge majority of the Senate energy committee supported the bill when it came to a vote. The top Republican on the committee supported it and the top Democrat on the committee supported it. They are the managers of this bill today. They have worked with Members of both parties and have lined up amendments already. They are working with Members of both parties to schedule even more. If you have an amendment you would like considered, please work with them. Let's get this process moving. Let's get this bill passed so we can support more jobs, more growth, and more energy independence for our country.

TRIBUTE TO MIKE BRUMAS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, before I leave the floor, let me say this as well. The chair of the energy committee knows how to write good legislation. We have proof of that before us today. But here is something else: The chair of the energy committee also knows how to pick good staff. Take Mike Brumas as one example. He served as her communications director. He served as communications director for the junior Senator from Alabama, too, and as chief of staff for the State's senior Senator. Mike also spent time covering Washington back when he was a reporter.

Mike Brumas obviously had a lot of experience under his belt by the time he came to work for me. Mike was an important part of my team, he worked hard, and he earned positions of trust among respected Members of our conference and among the Washington press corps. Mike was there both in the minority and in the majority as we made our way through many challenges, but he never let his good humor or his zest for life get lost along the way.

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



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People will tell you that Mike loves history and political history in particular. It is a shared passion that kept me challenged and often entertained. People will tell you a few other things about Mike too. He is always smiling. He is always laughing. He always has a story to tell and a recipe to share. This aspiring chef and endeavoring fly fisherman is happiest when he is with his family—his delightful wife Ann and his sons Alex and Will—and Mike is at his best when he is outdoors camping or biking or just simply enjoying life beyond these walls.

When Mike told me it was his time to retire from the Senate, I was sad to see him go, but at the same time I was glad to see him able to spend more time around the people and things that make Mike, Mike.

Ronald Michael Brumas came to my office as a colleague and leaves as a friend. I thank him for his many years of dedicated service to me and to this body, and I send him best wishes for a retirement that promises to be anything but boring.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

ENERGY LEGISLATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have joined with the Republican leader over the last couple of days saying good things about the bill that is on the floor. But today my friend the Republican leader stated that nothing has happened with energy in this country since 2007. That simply is not right. It is not true. We have done a lot of stuff in the Senate under President Obama to do good things about energy.

For example, the first major bill under President Obama was the so-called American Recovery Act, the stimulus bill. In that bill there was a lot of stuff to change the energy delivery system in this country to allow the creation of new power lines which were so badly needed all over America.

For those of us who represent Nevada, we have a power line that now goes from northern Nevada to southern Nevada, and it would never have happened but for that legislation we passed. And there was an announcement made 2 weeks ago that that line is now going to be taken even farther to make it easier to transport power to California—renewable energy power. I spoke to the owner of that line, who owns half of it with NV Energy, and soon they will be taking it clear to the Northwest.

Of course, in the stimulus bill, it was the first time there has been major legislation allowed for tax credits, tax incentives for doing renewable energy. And the bill we just passed, the omnibus bill, the tax extenders—there is tremendous stuff in that bill for renew-

able energy and other electricity initiatives.

So I like this bill that is on the floor. It is a good bill. But it simply is not valid to say that nothing has happened since 2007 because that is a gross understatement.

I really hope we can pass the bill that is on the floor. The vast majority of this bill contains the Shaheen-Portman legislation that we tried valiantly to get done in the past. It was blocked by Republican filibusters. Sadly, the co-sponsor of the bill twice voted against his own bill. The Senator from Ohio voted against his own legislation. I hope that doesn't happen again.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the President of the United States deserves the right to choose a team to carry out the work that is being done here, and the leader of that work to be done here is the President. It was the same way with President Bush, President Reagan, and President Clinton. They deserved a team—a team they chose—to help effectuate policies they saw as necessary for this country. The President of the United States deserves the right to choose a team to carry out his vision here at home and around the world—his vision. I am not alone in that belief. My friend, the senior Senator from Arizona, Mr. MCCAIN, said: “The President, in my view, has a clear right to put into place the team he believes will serve him best.”

Sadly, since President Obama was elected, Republicans have stopped at nothing to undermine the President's team—seeking to prevent progress by denying him the personnel he wants to carry out his agenda. Despite record obstruction, President Obama has achieved remarkable progress. I talked about some of that just a minute ago. Imagine what President Obama could have accomplished if Republicans took their constitutional duties seriously.

Regrettably, during the Obama Presidency, Republicans have done everything within their power to block, obstruct, stonewall, hinder qualified public servants from serving. In the first year of Republican control, the Senate confirmed the fewest nominations of any first session in memory. This blatant strategy of obstruction is shameful and dangerous to our economy and the national security of our country.

Headlines around the world remind us each day of the turmoil that exists in the global financial market and terrorism that threatens the world. Today we learned of multiple bombings yesterday and last night in Nigeria—lots of people killed. We can only wait and see where else that turmoil will arise.

Most Americans agree that we need a full complement of appointees to address the challenges we face. Republicans are preventing our government from doing its job at home and around the world.

According to the Congressional Research Service, the Senate banking

committee has reported out at least one nomination every year for the past 50 years, but not last year—last year, not a single nominee. Currently, nominees to the Federal Reserve Board, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and other important financial assignments are stalled in the banking committee. The committee has been operating under Republican leadership for the past 13 months, and they have yet to report a single nomination out of that committee. That is the definition of historic obstruction.

If there is any nominee who deserves to be confirmed immediately, it is a man by the name of Adam Szubin, whom the President nominated to combat terrorism financing—think about that—terrorism financing. He is desperately needed at the Treasury Department. Jack Lew has called me on many occasions talking about how this man needs to fill this assignment. He has expressed to me the importance of his job in trying to slow ISIS and their financial network and other terrorism activities around the country. As Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Crimes, Szubin would lead a team that disrupts terrorist financing networks, cutting off money for terrorists so they can't finance their evil deeds. He has served as a career civil servant under both Republican and Democratic Presidents.

Despite the importance of his work, Republicans are preventing a vote in the banking committee and thus preventing Adam Szubin from having a vote here on the Senate floor. He is currently acting—he is certainly acting in a role that is not permanent, which is why they call him an acting member of the Treasury Department. He lacks the stature that his counterparts have around the world. So he is not able to do all that should be done to disrupt terrorist financial networks throughout the world.

In a September hearing on his nomination, the chairman of the banking committee, the senior Senator from Alabama said: “Mr. Szubin is eminently qualified for this [position].”

Eminently qualified, not reported out of the banking committee, no vote here on the Senate floor—why are we holding up this critical nomination? We all know why. Powerful rightwing groups have announced that they are scoring votes on Presidential nominations. In fact, Heritage Action, which is a front group for the tea party and the Koch brothers, said the Senate should only confirm nominees they deem worthwhile—they deem, not Senators but this rightwing cabal. This comes at the expense of the American people and our national security.

If the Republican leadership follows this weird plan, scores of Ambassadors charged with representing our interests around the world could be prevented from service. They have been prevented from service.

We have several credible nominees currently awaiting floor votes. Ms.