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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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.

Infinite Spirit, generous giver of life's joys, from Your vantage point of eternity, look afresh into our times. Teach our lawmakers to serve You as they should so that they will do what is best for our Nation and world. As they seek to do Your will, help them to see Your glorious image in humanity and search for opportunities to empower those on life's margins.

Lord, inspire our Senators to trust the unfolding of Your loving providence so that they will not become weary in doing what is right. May they live with such integrity that Your purposes will be accomplished on Earth. Remind us all that it is in giving that we receive and through dying to self that we are born to eternal life.

We pray in Your great 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 (Ms. COLLINS). The Republican leader is recognized.

ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, there are a lot of reasons to like the broad bipartisan Energy bill which is

before us. You will like it if you are an American interested in producing more energy. You will like it if you are interested in paying less for energy. You will like it if you are an American interested in saving energy. There are a lot of important reasons to support the Energy Policy Modernization Act.

Here's another one. You will like it if you are an American interested in bolstering your country's long-term national security. That is always important, and Americans are telling us it is especially important today. They see our commanders, for instance, attempting to juggle myriad threats from across the globe with diminishing force structure. Well, if we are interested in improving our overall strategic position, then there are ways this broad bipartisan Energy bill can help.

First, the Energy Policy Modernization Act is designed to boost America's liquefied natural gas exports. That doesn't just hold potential for America's economy, it holds potential for America's global leadership, including the security of our allies. We know that Russia is the dominant supplier of natural gas to Western Europe, and we know that building America's own export capacity can enhance European energy security in the long run. So, in broad strokes, "by increasing our ability to export natural gas—in the form of liquefied natural gas or LNG—to Europe, the U.S. can weaken Russia's strategic stronghold while boosting our domestic economy by increasing energy exports." That is how Congressman CALVERT, a Republican, and Congressman ISRAEL, a Democrat, put it in an op-ed they authored last year after returning from a trip to Ukraine.

Here is what a former Obama energy adviser wrote in November: "Increased LNG trade can also enhance energy security for our allies," he said. "[Russian state-owned energy giant] Gazprom's grip on Europe is weakening, and U.S. LNG will accelerate that shift even as Russia seeks to counter it. . . ."

Enhancing America's own export capacity is also important when you consider that Iran has just been freed from Western sanctions and is looking to expand its own trade in energy resources, including its natural gas potential. Robust LNG exports to Asia can also enhance America's stature there, too, and give our allies in the region a stable source of energy.

Boosting America's natural gas exports is one reason to support the bill, but here is another. The Energy Policy Modernization Act is designed to reduce our foreign reliance on minerals and raw materials needed for everything from military assets to smart phones.

We can strengthen American mineral security by developing our world-class American mineral base. The necessary modern policies can move us ahead, and this bill contains positive steps forward.

Here's what else this bill would do. The Energy Policy Modernization Act is designed to defend our national energy grid from terrorist cyber attacks. It would help prepare us by authorizing additional cyber security research, it would help deter attacks by erecting stronger cyber security defenses, and it would help provide for faster and more effective responses when threats do arise.

At the end of the day, here is what you can say about the Energy Policy Modernization Act. It aims to make America more secure in an era of insecurity. It aims to make America more prosperous in a time of economic uncertainty. It is a bipartisan bill that deserves to pass. It is great to see so many Republicans and Democrats in this Chamber who actually agree with that. It is great to see both sides working with the bill managers to process amendments and move this legislation along.

I ask Members to continue working in the same spirit of cooperation.

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



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RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

FLINT, MICHIGAN, WATER CRISIS

Mr. REID. Madam President, in recent weeks the Nation has become concerned, afraid, and even outraged to learn that nearly 100,000 people who are residents of the city of Flint, MI, have been poisoned. About 9,000 of those poisoned are children under the age of 6 years.

Two years ago, in an effort to pinch pennies, an unelected emergency manager appointed by Governor Rick Snyder switched the water supply from the city of Flint, MI, water source to the Flint River. Water from the Flint River is contaminated with lead, bacteria that causes Legionnaires' disease, and lots of other bad things. As a result, the residents of Flint, MI, were forced to drink the water.

There is no trick photography here. This is a person in Flint, MI. You could go to any house you wanted to go to. This is the water that they were drinking and bathing in. It is hard to comprehend that this went on for such a long time.

Can you imagine taking a bath in this, brushing your teeth, or drinking it? How about bathing a new baby? This is your little bathtub.

Through no fault of their own, the people of Flint, MI, are being forced to endure a public health crisis that could have been avoided. This is a manmade crisis. We will never know the full extent of the damage to the people who live in Flint, MI—especially to the children. They have been harmed because they have been poisoned by the acts of the leadership in the State of Michigan, especially the Governor of the State of Michigan. The reckless decision to switch to unsafe drinking water was forced upon 100,000 people. These people in Flint, MI, are now exposed to water with high levels of lead—frighteningly high levels of lead—among other things. This is not just lead. There is bacteria, and they haven't determined the full extent of it. It is established.

I can remember when I first came to this body many, many years ago. I had the good fortune to chair a number of hearings in the environment committee dealing with lead poisoning.

At the time that we studied it, lead poisoning was lead that children ingested—children who lived in developments where there were large amounts of lead-based paint. The children who ate this lead—not on purpose—were not what they could have been. It affected their brains.

This lead in water, lead anyplace, affects the brain. It affects adults, too, but especially children. Lead causes serious problems for adults, as I mentioned, but it is especially dangerous for children, causing lifetime effects.

You can't get well. They have a program where they try to take the blood out and run it through a purifier. It takes a long time, but there are no safe levels of lead for children.

After the city made this wrong decision to switch its water source, it was really very quickly that the citizens of Flint complained that the water was discolored, and it also smelled. Everyone began to develop rashes.

The response of State government was appalling. Rick Snyder, the Governor of Michigan, is one of those who berates government all the time. Emails released from his office just last week referred to a resident who said she was told by a State nurse in January 2015, a little over a year ago—she was complaining about her son's elevated blood levels. The nurse told this woman: It is just a few IQ points. It is not the end of the world.

Can you imagine a health care worker telling someone: It is your baby, but it is just a few IQ points. No big deal. It is not the end of the world. This was a State nurse.

The water was so poisonous that General Motors, the manufacturer of automobile parts there, stopped using the source for their Flint engine operations because the parts corroded during the manufacturing process. They had to stop using this water. People were still drinking this water and bathing in this water.

Despite overwhelming evidence that a city in his State had lead poisoning, Governor Snyder failed to act and protect the people of Flint. This went on for a long time.

As Flint struggles to recover from this terrible public health problem, an investigation will determine who exactly is to blame for this reckless decision. We know who caused the problem.

This was a manmade disaster, as I said earlier, but now we must act to protect the residents of Flint. This protection should start with repairs to their water infrastructure. Like many cities—and there are quite a few in the Midwest—Flint has lead pipes, but the highly corrosive nature of the Flint River damaged them. It ate away at the insides of those pipes. Now these lead pipes are leaching into the clean water supply from Lake Huron. It will cost over \$1 billion to replace Flint's corroded water infrastructure.

The people in Flint, MI, are struggling. There has been money spent there. Flint had been doing quite well until this came along. There was a new vitality. But now people are afraid to eat in restaurants, and the businesses have been terribly damaged because people don't believe the water is pure. A lot of these restaurants, for example, put in their own water supply and water purification system, but people don't believe it. They are afraid.

We need this done now. The State and Federal Government must cooperate now to end this crisis, which requires that we make investments. I repeat: now.

President Obama has declared a state of emergency in Flint, MI, and given FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the authority to provide resources for the people of Flint. The problem is that right now they are just getting bottled water. The infrastructure is so bad.

Governor Snyder has finally—finally—declared a state of emergency and finally apologized for his administration's slow response. The Governor's apology is too late. The residents of Flint have already been poisoned.

It is too bad the people on that side of the aisle disparage the government all the time. It is too intrusive. It is too involved. It is detrimental to our society.

The Governor of Michigan is one of the leading cheerleaders of that theory. He denigrates government every single chance he gets. But to whom does he turn when the State of Michigan is in trouble? To the Federal Government. When emergency strikes, the Federal Government steps in. That is one of the responsibilities we have to protect America.

So I hope Senate Republicans will support our efforts to protect the people of Flint in this time of need. Senator MURKOWSKI—the chair of that important committee that has jurisdiction of the bill that is before this body today—is working with Senator CANTWELL. They are committed to doing something to help in this. Let's make sure we support them.

Sadly, some of the same Republicans who have called for relief when their States faced natural disasters are disparaging government action in Flint. For example, last year, Texas was devastated with historic flooding. But who stepped in? It was the Federal Government that stepped in to provide disaster relief for the people of Texas.

That is why I was disappointed to see the senior Senator from Texas say: "While we all have sympathy for what's happened in Flint, this is primarily a local and state responsibility." He didn't say that when the flooding was taking place in Texas.

Last year, as Florida was hit with extreme flooding, the junior Senator from Florida called for Federal disaster assistance. But when it comes to the children and families of Flint, the Senator, who finished third last night in the Iowa caucuses, cautions against any action. This is what he said about Flint: "I believe the federal government's role in some of these things (is) largely limited unless it involves a federal jurisdictional issue."

Well, the issue was that the State of Michigan didn't do what it was supposed to do.

The junior Senator from Florida is not alone. Republican Senators routinely rush to the floor to demand Federal aid when trouble hits their backyard. That is the right thing to do. Americans help each other in times of crisis.

This week the Senate has a chance to help the families suffering through a