

doing. It doesn't matter what was going on—if we were coming in early for the Inauguration or staying late for the State of the Union—he always had a smile. I never heard him speak a negative word or raise his voice. He treated everyone as a close friend and was a beacon of positivity. His passing leaves a hole that cannot be filled.

Senator COONS closed with a little Scripture from the New Testament. I think it was Galatians, if I am not mistaken. I will try to paraphrase a little something maybe from Luke and from the Book of James: People may not believe what we say; they will believe what we do. We lead by our example. And in our lives, it cannot be do as I say, but really do as I do.

Throughout his life, Vernon was a great example, not just for the people with whom he worked on the police force here, not just for all of us who came into contact with him throughout the day or week, but for some of those millions of people whose only lasting impression of our country that they took home with them wherever they came from around the world was this wonderful Capitol Police officer who took the time to talk with them, to listen to them, to be patient, to be helpful, and to be friendly.

There is a great lesson for all of us in that—a great lesson for all of us. For that, Vernon, we thank you. God bless you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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.

AGRICULTURAL EXPORT EXPANSION ACT

Ms. HEITKAMP. Mr. President, I rise to talk about a bill which I introduced that I would love to have the Presiding Officer's sponsorship, given how important the Port of Louisiana is to American agriculture and certainly commodities that we ship across the world. It is called the Agricultural Export Expansion Act that I introduced with Senator BOOZMAN as my cosponsor. We have a great bipartisan lineup of people who are interested in this.

So what does this bill do? I will say, very rarely does a day go by—whether I am in North Dakota or whether I am here in Washington, DC—that I don't speak with or hear from North Dakota farmers and ranchers. The agriculture economy is absolutely critical to North Dakota. Almost one-quarter of North Dakota workers are farmers and ranchers or they are employed in farm-related jobs. During every meeting, farmers and ranchers express the urgent need—the urgent need—to open trade with Cuba and to stop tying the hands of our producers.

Just on Tuesday our barley growers were in my office telling me about how

important the market in Cuba could be. Last week it was the Dry Bean Council telling me what I already know from my visit with Cuba: The products we grow in the United States—like North Dakota pinto beans or Arkansas rice—are compatible with the Cuban diet, and there is high demand for our high-quality products.

These aren't just crops that North Dakota grows. These are crops that North Dakota knows exceptionally well and that we excel in. My State is the No. 1 producer of barley, multiple varieties of beans, lentils, and certain types of wheat. Enabling agriculture exports to Cuba would be a huge boon for North Dakota farmers and ranchers, as well as those from many other States.

Unfortunately, because of trade barriers the United States puts on itself, the Cuban people aren't eating North Dakota beans, Kansas wheat or Arkansas rice. Instead, they are importing those products from countries much further away—like Brazil, Canada, Europe, and even Vietnam. I would say not only in terms of proximity of our product to the Cuban market—which is a huge freight advantage—we also have the highest quality of products. So we are forfeiting what in fact would be a natural market for us. Think about that. In this day, where trade is so important—where improving our balance of trade is so important—we will not be able to access the Cuban market.

Congress has eased some restrictions on exports to Cuba for agricultural products. They did that back in 2000 with the passage of the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act. That was a great first step. We did make some progress in increased sales to Cuba. Unfortunately, now that same law is holding us back.

The administration made important changes to U.S. policy and opened some travel and some trade to Cuba starting with their January 2015 changes. Most recently, including last month, the administration made more changes, including allowing for financing of authorized exports to Cuba. Unfortunately, those exports are other than agricultural exports. Because of our once forward-looking bill, agricultural exporters are prohibited now from offering financing that all other exporters can provide to Cuba. That needs changing.

In 2014 I visited Cuba. I met with Cuban agricultural trade officials to discuss bilateral economic benefits of expanding agricultural exports from North Dakota and the United States to Cuba. These are conversations we need to continue to have.

Last April I and Senator BOOZMAN introduced our bipartisan bill to level the playing field for our farmers and ranchers and make sure we can compete with the rest of the world in Cuba. What does that bill do and how does it improve our trade relationship with Cuba? One of the greatest barriers we have in getting our products to Cuba is

we can't finance it. Some might say: Well, we don't want to put government taxpayer dollars at risk. This bill does not put one taxpayer dollar at risk. We are talking about opening the market so we can access private financing for agricultural exports to Cuba. Let me repeat that. No taxpayer dollars are at risk. It is based entirely on individual risk assessment and decisions. Our bill is supported by the U.S. Agricultural Coalition for Cuba, a wide-ranging coalition including every grower group and industry association.

This week, the Cuban Government announced that El Nino is going to create an even greater loss of agricultural products in Cuba. This is going to create an even greater opportunity for our agricultural exports—a greater opportunity. Why—why—why would we let other countries keep eating our lunch and dominating this important market, especially given our proximity? It is time for Congress to get out of American agriculture's way and let private businesses make exporting and financing decisions.

I urge all of my colleagues to cosponsor and help pass our bill, S. 1049, the Agricultural Export Expansion Act.

Finally, I want to talk about the challenges that American agriculture has. Higher-dollar value has put tremendous stress on our products. We have seen corn prices drop, we have seen soybean prices drop, we have seen American agriculture challenged in ways we haven't seen for the last decade. How do we fix that problem? With another government program? Maybe we will have to help or expand the farm bill to deal with our food security issues created by low commodity prices. I will not take that off the table, but I will say the surest way that we can get out from underneath these challenges is export, is to provide for trade. It is one of the reasons I supported TPA. I believe it is great for American commodities to access additional markets and take down trade barriers to provide us with market, but why are we artificially standing in the way of private investment and private financing of American agricultural products? It is time that we do the right thing by American agriculture and open this market. We can take this incremental step without having this body agree to lifting any kind of embargo. We can take this incremental step without changing the prohibition we have on Federal-sponsored marketing programs. We can begin to access the Cuban market and introduce our high-quality beans, edible peas, and lentils. We can do that.

I will close with a story about my great friend MARIA CANTWELL from the State of Washington. Washington also grows what we call a lot of cross crops—although, I would argue that ours are probably even lot better than what is grown in the State of Washington.

MARIA CANTWELL went on a trade mission to try to sell Washington State

lentils. After hours of listening to the trade officials and Mr. Castro, she was successful in convincing him to buy lentils. The lentils he eventually bought were from North Dakota.

We have an opportunity to access this market—not just for North Dakota but for the State of Washington, for the State of Louisiana, for the State of Arkansas, for the State of Kansas. For all of our agricultural producers, open this market, give us the ability to do what we do in every other place. We aren't putting taxpayer dollars at risk. We are simply asking for access to markets.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SASSE. 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 GEORGIA POWERS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to mourn the loss of an honored Kentuckian and civil rights icon, Georgia Powers, who fought for civil rights and marched in protest of racial injustice, died on January 30. She was 92 years old.

As the first African American to serve in Kentucky's State Senate, Georgia Powers paved the way for African Americans in Kentucky to enter public service. Even before her election to the senate, she had earned recognition across the State for her efforts to fight for equal rights.

In 1964 she helped organize a march on Frankfort to support a bill that would open public accommodations to African Americans. In 1966, thanks in part to her work, the Kentucky General Assembly passed a civil rights law, making Kentucky the first southern State to do so.

Among the many supporters Powers brought to Frankfort for the 1964 march were baseball legend Jackie Robinson—the man who broke the color barrier in professional baseball—and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Powers remained a close confidant of King's until his death in 1968.

Georgia Powers was born in 1923 in Washington County, KY, as one of nine children. Her family moved to Louisville when she was a little girl, and Louisville was the city that she loved her whole life and represented in the Kentucky Senate.

Georgia Powers' political career was born out of her fight for civil rights. She tried to work with members of the Kentucky Legislature on antidiscrimination laws and found them unresponsive. So when the incumbent senator in her home district in Louisville chose not to run again in 1967, she moved from protest to politics.

The first piece of legislation she sponsored in the senate, a bill for open housing, passed 28 to 3. That was the beginning of a successful 21-year political career. She would go on to become the chairwoman of the senate's labor and industry committee and the sponsor of the Equal Rights Amendment in Kentucky.

One of the earliest bills she introduced in the State senate was to remove racial identification from State drivers' licenses. Powers has said that she was prompted to do this based on her own experience as a 16-year-old trying to get a drivers' license. She was asked her race and the sting of discrimination stayed with her.

Georgia Powers built a stronger, fairer Kentucky by her life's work and her leadership. She was an inspiration to many, including me, for her determination in the face of injustice. I knew and worked with Senator Powers back when I served as the Judge-Executive of Jefferson County. I can personally attest that she was funny, tenacious, and tough as nails—an admirable woman and a respected senator.

Georgia Powers is remembered and mourned by many, including Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer, Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin, and even boxing legend Muhammad Ali. Many Kentuckians in public service today cite her as a guiding influence.

Georgia Powers made fighting discrimination her legacy. I ask my Senate colleagues to join me in honoring her as one of Kentucky's most important leaders and a champion of civil rights. She will be remembered as a Kentuckian of courage and conviction, and she is greatly missed.

REMEMBERING U.S. CAPITOL POLICE OFFICER VERNON ALSTON, JR.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, today I wish to remember U.S. Capitol Police Officer Vernon Alston, who passed away on January 23, 2016. Officer Alston was a fixture on the Capitol Grounds for 20 years, and he is missed by the many who were honored to have known him.

Those who knew Officer Alston best describe him as someone who loved his family, his job, and helping others. For two decades, he helped members of the Capitol Hill community by keeping us safe, and on the day he passed away, he helped members of his own community in Magnolia, DE, by shoveling snow for his neighbors.

Officer Alston was a caring and modest man who took great pride in his work. As a former Capitol Police officer myself, I understand the dedication and sacrifice required of members of the Capitol Police force, and Officer Alston was an exemplar of these traits. I am saddened that the U.S. Capitol Police has lost one of our own, but I will always be grateful for Officer Alston's service to the Capitol Police force and to our Nation.

Officer Alston was loved dearly by his friends and family. He is survived by his wife Nicole; daughters Brittany and Yasmine; and sons Brandon, Israel, and Breyden. My condolences go out to Officer Alston's family during this difficult time.

RECENT REGULATORY CHANGES RELATED TO CUBA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, last week the administration took another step in unraveling the web of onerous, misguided, and self-defeating restrictions on the ability of American citizens to travel to Cuba and to interact with the people of Cuba.

Effective as of January 27, the Departments of Treasury and Commerce published revised regulations that end certain payment and financing restrictions, allow for more authorized exports to Cuba in a variety of sectors, and expand authorized travel categories and allow additional travel-related transactions.

Restrictions on providing access to credit, which have been among the most commonly cited barriers to exporting to Cuba, were removed. Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control amended regulations regarding non-agricultural exports, and it is now possible for U.S. banks to provide direct financing for authorized exports to Cuba, as opposed to requiring cash in advance or routing through a third country which had stymied many transactions that could benefit American companies and Cuban consumers.

General licenses, meaning that a specific license application is no longer required, are now provided for a variety of categories, including telecommunications items that improve communications to, from, and among Cubans; certain agricultural items, such as insecticides and equipment, although not agricultural commodities; items for the safety of civil aviation and safe operation of commercial aircraft; and items necessary for the environmental protection of U.S. and international air quality, waters, or coastlines including items related to renewable energy or energy efficiency.

And it is now permissible, subject to case-by-case review, to export to some Cuban state-owned enterprises that "provide goods and services to the Cuban people." This includes items for agricultural production, education, food processing, public transportation, wholesale distribution, and construction of facilities for supplying energy, among others. As much as we disagree with many of the policies of the Cuban Government, it is undeniable that it provides health care, education, public transportation, and many other services that the Cuban people rely on.

However, exports to state-owned enterprises that primarily generate revenue for the government remain ineligible to receive U.S. exports along with military, police, intelligence, and security services.