

President George Herbert Walker Bush, we have heard about his life and his legacy. It has been, really, a celebration of a life well lived. It is hard to imagine someone packing more into 94 years than George H. W. Bush packed into his life. We heard about his time in the Navy, when he volunteered after Pearl Harbor, became a naval aviator, was shot down, and was saved by a submarine that popped up and rescued him. We, of course, know about his devotion to public service, but we also learned a lot more about his sense of humanity, his humility, his loyalty, and his optimism.

Sometimes in Washington it seems like the message is all negative, and I think this has been a delightful contrast, reflecting on his life and his contribution.

I have said previously, talking about President Bush, that there is nothing as powerful as a good example. I think his example is one we all ought to contemplate and perhaps strive to emulate in our own way and in the way we conduct our business here.

When people disagree with us, it doesn't mean they are bad people; they are just people with different ideas. We ought to respect one another enough to actually debate those ideas, rather than engage in name-calling and denigrating the level of discourse among us because people watch us too. They watch how we conduct ourselves here, and they take some cues from that in how they conduct themselves online, in PTA meetings, in our communities, and in our States.

This has been a delightful week. It has been kind of an emotional and exhausting week as we have grieved with the Bush family but at the same time, as I said, celebrating an incredible life.

#### SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Madam President, perhaps we have about 2 more weeks of work before the end of the year. I am told the House will pass a 2-week continuing resolution, taking us up to December 21. We will have a chance to pass that here. The window of opportunity for us to finish our work in the Senate is closing rapidly, and there is a lot we need to get done. We have an opportunity to build off of accomplishments we have made in these last 2 years and to get our remaining to-do list checked off.

The leader called the Senate fertile ground for productive, bipartisan work. That is because the way we are built, the way our rules are constructed, it basically requires us to do things in a bipartisan way in the main.

Several of our biggest achievements for the Senate in this Congress couldn't have happened without bipartisan support, like the landmark opioids legislation to help those struggling with drug addiction or the historic bill to improve veterans' care, shepherded by Senator ISAKSON, the Senator from Georgia.

Our work for the rest of the year will also require cooperation in a bipartisan spirit, particularly when it comes to

funding what is left of our government. We have already joined together to fund roughly 75 percent of the Federal Government on time and through regular order for the first time in two decades. That is pretty remarkable and welcomed.

While we complete our work on the remaining appropriations bills, I expect a lot of the focus to be on border security. It is no secret, coming from a border State, that this is very serious business to me. I know it is to many of our colleagues. We have been reminded by the caravans of migrants from Central America—sweeping across Mexico and ending up in Tijuana, right across from San Diego—that collectively we have a lot of work to do to address these mass migrations.

I went to Mexico City on Saturday with Vice President PENCE; the Secretary of Energy, Rick Perry; the Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Nielsen; and other officials who were there. We had Members of the House, and Senator LEE from Utah and I were the Members of the Senate representing the U.S. Government at the inauguration of President Lopez Obrador.

What we have read, including today, that the incoming Lopez Obrador administration has already been hard at work, working with our Homeland Security officials to come up with an agreement to deal with these mass migrations—these caravans of people coming from Central America, across Mexico, and seeking asylum in the United States.

I have spoken many times about how these so-called caravans have been preceded by minicaravans; that is, smaller numbers of people coming to our border and seeking entry and, in many instances, seeking to exploit loopholes in our law that only Congress can fix. I am frustrated, like many of us, that we have been unwilling to get our Democratic colleagues to work with us to fix those loopholes.

What I am encouraged by is, the incoming administration of the Mexican President as well as the Trump administration have worked to arrange for these asylum seekers to spend their time in Mexico waiting for their asylum claims to be adjudicated. I think that is a big change in the way Mexico has regarded this issue.

Previously, they have regarded the issue as our problem, not their problem. They have actually issued transit visas for people to transit Mexico. Basically, the message is: As long as you don't stop here, we are not going to do anything about your coming across Mexico. Now they realize this is their problem and our problem, and the only way we are going to be able to solve this problem is working together, along with the governments of Central America, where people are fleeing gang violence.

It is hard to blame people for fleeing when they realize their circumstances are so dire in their home country, but

I think there is a lot we can and we should do, working with them, to help them improve circumstances in their home countries so they don't feel they have to come to the United States to seek asylum and turn themselves over to the tender mercies of the drug cartels and the people who view them as just another commodity by which they make money, just like heroin they sell in the United States, just like children and women whom they traffic for sex slavery. These drug cartels are the same organizations, the transnational criminal organizations. I don't think that reality has quite sunk in here in Washington.

These are not nice people. These are dangerous people. All you need to do is look at the trial of El Chapo occurring in Manhattan—the head of one of the largest cartels—and read about some of the evidence that has been introduced. The U.S. Government has extradited him to the United States and is now prosecuting him. The evidence will chill your blood. He is a vicious, dangerous person whose only interest is in making money and enriching himself and his fellow cartel members.

I am encouraged by some of these nascent discussions that will perhaps lead to an agreement between the Government of Mexico and the United States.

In addition to completing our most basic task of funding the government, we have to work hard to get more of the President's team in place. I have never seen an administration more sandbagged with more foot-dragging by the Senate and the Democrats when it comes to confirming noncontroversial nominees to serve in the President's administration. This is just another way to undermine their ability to get their work done there.

This is one of our greatest responsibilities under the Constitution, to provide advice and consent to the President's nominees, whether they are judges, whether they are Ambassadors, or wherever in a Senate-confirmed position in the administration.

We have seen a record number of cloture votes during the last 2 years because, again, our colleagues on the other side have simply wanted to burn the clock, waste time, and then vote overwhelming to confirm noncontroversial nominees. All that does is prevent us from getting our work done on a timely basis and makes it harder to fill these vacancies.

In the first 2 years of the Trump administration, the majority leader, the Senator from Kentucky, has made nominations a top priority, particularly judicial nominations, but we still have a number of nominees with exemplary records waiting for confirmation.

I talked to Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State. He said they have a number of ambassadorships, a number of important positions in our diplomatic corps vacant for no other reason than the foot-dragging and the obstruction we have seen by the other side. It

is just shameful. These are well-qualified and accomplished men and women who have put their lives on hold, and they are languishing on our calendar. We need to get them confirmed.

We will advance two of those nominees today: Bernard McNamee, to serve on the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and Kathleen Kraninger, to be Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. I also hope to add to our historic number of judicial confirmations by ensuring that more well-qualified judges are confirmed in our Federal and district courts.

As you know, Madam President, so far we have confirmed 84 judges nominated by President Trump, and I hope we are able to continue this work and ensure that more highly regarded judges are able to join their ranks in the Federal judiciary, both this year and in the next 2 years—the final 2 years of the first term of President Trump.

Before we adjourn the 115th Congress, we need to pass the farm bill, the conference report. Its importance can't be overstated. I know the Presiding Officer comes from a State where agriculture is important. I know of her personal experience leading the ag sector in Mississippi.

The farm bill safeguards the future of our agriculture community. When we think about that phrase “our agriculture community,” our minds often conjure up farmers and ranchers, but the circle of that community is far wider, encompassing rural communities and indeed our entire country. Most of our country is rural, and agriculture is absolutely critical.

We have all heard the saying, “Thank a farmer three times a day.” That is true, but, in reality, we should be thanking them a lot more because the ag community does more than just provide the food we eat, and that is important, but they do a lot more.

In small towns and rural communities, like those in Texas, agriculture is the heartbeat of the economy. Farmers and ranchers, of course, send their children to local schools; they shop on Main Street; they buy groceries at the supermarket; they bank at their local bank or credit union; they receive loans for new equipment so they can grow their businesses and fund their operations. They are interwoven with our communities all across the country, and they deserve our support and some predictability and stability.

The farm bill is renewed once every 5 years, supporting the ag community in several ways. It addresses food production by helping ensure Americans continue to enjoy access to the safest, cheapest, and most reliable food supply in the world.

Our farmers and ranchers do this so well that many of us kind of take it for granted and always assume that the food will be there when we want it and need it. Most of the rest of the world doesn't enjoy that sort of abundance or the certainty that it will always be there.

The farm bill also impacts many other areas, like forestry, research, nutrition programs, and humanitarian aid to foreign countries, just to name a few.

In Texas, one out of every seven working Texans work in the agriculture industry. Farmers and ranchers, unfortunately, know all too well that Mother Nature can and has disrupted harvest and devastated crops, which we saw in abundance with Hurricane Harvey just a little over a year ago. That is perhaps why the most important thing the farm bill does is give the ag community the support and predictability it needs and it deserves, so we need to get to work and get that done before we go home for Christmas.

Our to-do list may seem daunting to some, but the reason we are able to keep our heads in the game and continue to build off our momentum is because of the incredible record of achievement we have seen in the 115th Congress; that would be for the first 2 years of the Trump administration, where we have had Republican majorities in the House and in the Senate. It is a historic record of achievement and accomplishment.

That record fundamentally includes the economic gains we have seen, renewed confidence, optimism about the future, more jobs, and low unemployment.

The Hispanic and African-American unemployment rates are at the lowest in recorded history. That is quite an accomplishment. Unemployment is so low around the country that there is a genuine demand and need for more trained workers. That is another challenge for us—to provide people the opportunity to learn the skills they need in order to fill these good, well-paying jobs that are demanding and needing more employees.

The accomplishments we have made I would like to think are the result of, first, listening to what our constituents are telling us and then translating that into legislation that will actually improve their lives. For example, in an effort to ease the regulatory burden on jobseekers, the President signed three bills that I introduced into law. They may not seem like monumental, landmark pieces of legislation, but covering the subject matter they do, I think they help my constituents in real and important ways.

The first bill is an occupational licensing reform bill called the New HOPE Act, which gives States the tools they need to reduce barriers in certain professions. Some licensing requirements in some of the States are so onerous, so expensive and time-consuming, they basically freeze out people who have those skills or talents and want to use those to make a living. But the New HOPE Act helps give States additional tools to reduce some of those barriers.

Two other bills help veterans who are making the transition back to civilian life. The Jobs for Our Heroes Act

makes it easier for veterans to get a commercial driver's license. One thing I have heard from my constituents back home is we need more truck drivers, and we need better roads for them to drive those trucks on. We have a lot of veterans who have learned how to drive big, heavy trucks in the course of their military service, and we have now helped expedite their transition to a commercial driver's license and good, well-paying jobs, with huge demand.

We also passed the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act to help local law enforcement agencies hire veterans so that they can continue to protect the American people here at home. If you read the newspaper, you see that law enforcement agencies are really desperate to get well-qualified, well-trained people to join their police forces and law enforcement. This is a way, again, for veterans to make that transition and to take the skills they have learned in the military and make those available for public safety and civilian life.

Veterans' rights issues have been a passion of mine since I was honored to serve as the attorney general of Texas. I have continued to work here in the Senate and, this Congress, introduced three bills focusing on protecting victims, which were signed into law. One called the SAFER Act is aimed at reducing the big backlog of untested rape kits. At one point it was estimated to be 400,000 backlogged rape kits; that is, forensic evidence, DNA collected after a sexual assault, which is absolutely key to solving that crime and identifying the perpetrator. By the way, it also has the ability to exonerate people who may be arrested for it; basically, the DNA test and the rape kit can essentially rule them out as a potential suspect.

We also passed the Justice Served Act, which assists law enforcement in prosecuting cold cases solved by DNA evidence. The sorts of things we can now do as a result of the scientific achievements of being able to test DNA have opened up whole new vistas for law enforcement to use that science in powerful and important ways, such as to reduce the rape kit backlog and to solve violent crimes.

The third bill I will mention is called the PROTECT Our Children Act, which reauthorizes task forces combating child exploitation online. We all know that the internet is an integral part of our lives. Unfortunately, there are people who use the internet to gain access to vulnerable children and recruit them or otherwise exploit them online. So the PROTECT Our Children Act reauthorizes task forces—law enforcement agencies, primarily—to combat child exploitation online. Not every local police department or sheriff's department has the tax base to be able to generate the revenue they need to hire the expertise or to get the technology they need in order to combat this heinous crime. So that is where I think it is appropriate for the Federal Government to step up and say: Let's get the

best practices. Let's figure out what the standard should be, and then help fill those gaps to combat child exploitation.

Perhaps the most significant accomplishment Congress made in terms of my State over the last 2 years was working together to deliver disaster relief to those suffering from Hurricane Harvey. That catastrophic flooding and damage caused by Harvey is something we hope to never see again during our lifetime, but that is a hope I am afraid is in vain. We know there will always be more hurricanes and more floods.

I was proud to join forces with the junior Senator from Texas, Mr. CRUZ, to secure nearly \$147 billion that was available for disaster relief, including Hurricane Harvey, but not limited to Hurricane Harvey. It is also for the wildfires out West and the hurricanes that hit Florida, Puerto Rico, and other parts of the country.

In addition to the disaster relief, we passed two pieces of legislation that specifically addressed the needs of my constituents in Texas. The first makes houses of worship eligible for certain grants to help them rebuild after disasters. Many houses of worship have essentially public facilities that they make available to the community that are unrelated to proselytizing, and we made sure that these FEMA grants were available to help them rebuild after disasters.

The second was a tax relief provision that allows Texans to deduct property damage costs and access retirement savings without penalties. That is something we did for Hurricane Katrina in the wake of Katrina. We did so after Hurricane Harvey as well. It is just another way we have made people's lives a little bit better after suffering from this natural disaster.

While aid after a disaster helps those affected to be able to rebuild, it does little good if we are not also working to help prevent or mitigate the threat of flooding and future hurricanes. So we passed provisions that will expedite, for example, a coastal study and that authorizes flood mitigation projects along the gulf coast.

Most of the refined product needed for jet fuel and gasoline is refined along the gulf coast of Texas and Louisiana. So it is important from a national perspective—not just from a local perspective—that we do everything we can to anticipate and mitigate against future threats and threats to our Nation's refined energy products supply.

I feel fortunate to be in the U.S. Senate. I am proud of the work we have done in the 115th Congress. But we need to finish our job and get our work completed before Christmas.

As we close out the 115th Congress, the types of accomplishments I have mentioned, frankly, don't necessarily get a lot of attention because most of these are bipartisan bills that we pass without a lot of controversy or a lot of noise. But I hope we can continue to

build on these accomplishments for the benefit of my constituents in Texas and Americans across the country.

We have just a short time left, 2 weeks, perhaps, assuming we can pass—and I do expect we will pass—a 2-week continuing resolution, taking us up to the 21st. Honestly, I don't think we need to wait that long. We know what we have to do; we just need to come together and get it done. Then we can all go home and be with our families and loved ones during Christmas.

## LEGISLATIVE SESSION

### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

### MAJOR ROBERT ODELL OWENS POST OFFICE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 5238 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

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

The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5238) to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 1234 Saint Johns Place in Brooklyn, New York, as the "Major Robert Odell Owens Post Office".

There being no objection, the committee was discharged, and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. CORNYN. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 5238) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

### THE LARRY DOBY CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 1861, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1861) to award a Congressional Gold Medal in honor of Lawrence Eugene "Larry" Doby in recognition of his achieve-

ments and contributions to American major league athletics, civil rights, and the Armed Forces during World War II.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time.

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

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I know of no further debate on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing none, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 1861) was passed.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

### NATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT MUSEUM EXHIBITS ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 1417 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1417) to amend the National Law Enforcement Museum Act to allow the Museum to acquire, receive, possess, collect, ship, transport, import, and display firearms, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. CORNYN. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 1417) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

### REAL ID ACT MODIFICATION FOR FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 3398 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3398) to amend the Real ID Act of 2005 to permit Freely Associated States to meet identification requirements under such Act, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Committee was discharged and the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.