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House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Thursday, January 28, 2016, at 2 p.m.

Senate

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 27, 2016

The Senate met at 11 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.

Spirit of God, who brought creation out of the void, light from darkness, and order from chaos, may Your Name be praised. Inspire our Senators. Use their daily experiences of joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, victory and defeat for Your glory. Remind them that no evil can stop the unfolding of Your purposes and providence, as You work through them to bring harmony where there is discord. May they find joy in Your faithfulness.

Lord, lead them with Your merciful hands as You continue to provide for their needs. Protect them and their loved ones with the shield of Your love.

We pray in Your merciful 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 (Mr. SULLIVAN). The majority leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING U.S. CAPITOL POLICE OFFICER VERNON ALSTON

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, we were very saddened to hear of the loss of U.S. Capitol police officer Vernon Alston this past weekend.

Officer Alston served on the force for nearly two decades, working to protect all of us. Capitol police chief Kim Dine said that his passing, at the age of 44, was “truly a tragic loss for the Alston family and for the United States Capitol Police, which in fact is actually one and the same.”

I know his fellow officers would agree. I know his service and dedication will be remembered by all who knew him. I know our colleagues will join me in holding his family in our thoughts.

ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION BILL

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, the Energy Policy Modernization Act is the result of months of hard work across the aisle. It passed committee with overwhelming bipartisan support. Congress hasn't passed legislation to update America's energy policies in nearly a decade. It is time we change that.

This broad, bipartisan energy bill offers a good way forward. It will help Americans produce more energy. It will help Americans pay less for energy. It will help Americans save energy. Not only will this bipartisan legislation help bring our energy policies in line with the demands of today, it will also position us to benefit from the oppor-

tunities of tomorrow. So let's work together and pass it.

The Senators from Alaska and Washington are proven bill managers. I ask our colleagues who have amendments they would like to be considered to bring them to the managers. Let's get going and pass this important legislation for our country.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING U.S. CAPITOL POLICE OFFICER VERNON ALSTON

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Officer Alston was an exemplary police officer.

If his death accomplishes nothing more than the fact that people need to be very aware of what happens during times of exertion—there were 18 people who died during the snowstorm from shoveling snow.

Officer Alston was a picture of fitness. He was a weight lifter. He took care of himself as well as anybody could. It is such a shame that he is no longer going to be able to take care of his family. As Senator McCONNELL said, our hearts go out to him.

But, as I said, if nothing else, please, everyone, focus on this: Be very careful. There is still lots of snow out there, and if there is not snow now, there will be at some subsequent time. Please be very careful. You may think that you are powerful and you lift weights and all of that stuff, but be

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



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careful because that snow is very hard to shovel. It is very heavy, and it can create problems.

My condolences go out to the family of Officer Alston. He was a police officer, and we look out for our own. I am very sorry he passed away.

ENERGY POLICY MODERNIZATION BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, making America's clean energy future sustainable for our children and grandchildren has long been a priority for Senate Democrats.

Today the Senate will begin consideration of a bipartisan bill that makes progress doable on this important goal. We have long sought to pass a number of priorities included in this bill. Through the stimulus package, we made one of the largest investments in clean energy in the entire history of the country. In fact, let me just say it this way: It is the largest investment in the history of the country in clean air energy.

When Democrats were in the majority, we fought valiantly to pass a bipartisan piece of legislation called Shaheen-Portman. It was an innovative efficiency bill that would have reduced carbon emissions, would have saved families and businesses huge amounts of money, and supported 200,000 jobs in America.

We tried to get this done. The Senator from Ohio came to me and said: We need to get this done. I said: I agree with you; so what do you need? He told me what he needed, and we agreed to that. But I am sorry to report that on at least two separate occasions, my Republican friends chose obstruction that prevented the Senate from passing this bipartisan piece of legislation. Then, even the Republican sponsor of the bill wouldn't vote for it—his own bill. He voted against it.

Today we have another opportunity. This is the third or fourth time that we are moving to this. I hope we can get this done. I think there is no reason we shouldn't be able to, because we are a responsible minority. We want to get things done. We want to pass legislation. We don't want to obstruct everything.

Senators MURKOWSKI and CANTWELL have worked very hard to pass this bill called the Energy Policy Modernization Act. They did it through the committee they are responsible for leading. I commend both Senators for their sound leadership.

I am also happy—and I will just mention a few other things that this legislation addresses. Part of it includes permanent authorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We did some very good things in the omnibus that we passed to take care of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. We funded it for 3 years, and that is more than we have done in a long time. But my Republican colleagues allowed the authorization legislation to expire last

year for 3 months before we were able to finally renew it. So I hope we can pass this part of the bill untouched.

Most of the key provisions included in the Shaheen-Portman energy efficiency bill are in this bill. That is really important. There is \$40 billion in energy authorizations, including for basic research, home energy efficiency, and clean vehicles. Those are just a few of the items. Through these provisions, this legislation will save consumers as much as \$60 billion. And not only that, it reduces a significant amount of carbon pollution generated by dirty fossil energy sources.

It is estimated that passing the Energy Policy Modernization Act would reduce carbon emissions equal to taking every car and truck in the United States off the road for a year. That is a pretty big deal. Over the next 15 years, the energy sector will need to replace 2 million workers and hire an additional 1.5 million for new jobs. That is what this legislation will allow. This bill makes progress toward training a skilled workforce fully equipped to take advantage of high-paying job opportunities in the energy sector.

The Senate works best when Democrats and Republicans, the majority and the minority, work together on behalf of the American people. As written, the Murkowski-Cantwell energy bill could win bipartisan approval on the Senate floor, and we can do it right now.

As with all legislation, there is no question that the energy bill could be improved, and there will be efforts made to do that. I certainly solicit amendments, as did the Republican leader, but get them over here. It is my understanding the majority leader is now promising to allow amendments. That is what the Republican leader said a few minutes ago, and I am sure that is appropriate. Members of my caucus welcome opportunities to help strengthen the bill. However, we can't allow extreme Republican ideological amendments to poison this opportunity. The Murkowski-Cantwell energy bill must remain a bipartisan piece of legislation.

Clean energy, infrastructure, and conservation are priorities of the middle class and all Americans. So I urge my Republican colleagues to recognize the good work of Senators MURKOWSKI and CANTWELL and work with Democrats to pass this bipartisan legislation.

PUERTO RICO

Mr. REID. Mr. President, on another matter, the island of Puerto Rico continues to face billions of dollars of debt. I don't know the number—\$17 billion. We hear all kinds of numbers. Puerto Rico is part of America. We must work together to address the severe economic and fiscal crisis that has gripped our fellow citizens.

I was in a meeting yesterday where I was told that on the island of Puerto

Rico there is a shortage of suitcases—luggage—because people are leaving and most of them are coming to Florida. They are desperate. Many have said that the dire state of Puerto Rico's economy could become a humanitarian crisis, and that is really true.

The time to act is now. I joined Senator CANTWELL and all of my Democratic colleagues in calling on the Republican leader to advance legislation that gives Puerto Rico the protection it so desperately needs. We did send a letter to the Republican leader.

Any solution that doesn't provide Puerto Rico the ability to restructure debt would be an abject failure. Legislation that empowers Puerto Rico to adjust a significant portion of its debt would not cost the Federal Government a single penny. This is far from a bailout. It would save U.S. taxpayers from the growing cost of inaction.

Over 3 million Americans live on the island of Puerto Rico, and they are looking to Congress for help in their time of need.

I spoke to the Speaker myself, and he has made a commitment to address the economic emergency in Puerto Rico before the end of March. This has to be more than a hearing. We need to have something done substantively to help that territory.

Today Democrats call on the Republican leader to make the same commitment PAUL RYAN has made to address the economic emergency in Puerto Rico soon. There is really no time to spare. Republicans should join us in our commitment to assist our fellow Americans.

Earlier this month, I sent a letter separate and apart from the one all Democrats sent, outlining the steps the Senate can take to help Puerto Rico. If the Republican leader is unsure where to begin, he could heed what I have suggested and appoint a task force to find a bipartisan solution to this economic crisis. But as far as I am concerned, that is way down the list. I am not someone who favors task forces. I think the work should be done by committees and by our committee chairs and ranking members. I believe anything that one would try to do—that is, having another hearing, appointing a task force—is only an effort to stall the inevitable.

Puerto Rico needs help. They need to be treated as other American citizens and be able to file bankruptcy. It would not apply to any State. It would apply only to this territory. We must act now to relieve the hardships facing these people and avoid additional costs to taxpayers because there will be additional costs if we don't resolve this now.

Mr. President, I ask the Chair to announce the business of the day.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.