

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of the Republican leader, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 3979, the defense authorization bill.

At 10:30 a.m., there will be a cloture vote on the motion to concur on the defense authorization bill.

Mr. President, the work we are going to do on this defense authorization bill is extremely important for our country. I will have more to say about that in just a minute.

 TRIBUTE TO JAMES FRANSEN

Mr. REID. Today's generation goes to Google for answers to questions they have about geography, about politics, famous people, or any subject. Any subject, you name it, and we all go to Google as quickly as we can. But long before Google, we had to use books, encyclopedias, volumes of books containing all sorts of facts on topics, and they were all in alphabetic order. For almost the last 40 years—39 to be exact—the Senate has had its own encyclopedia—legislative counsel Jim Fransen.

Jim began his Senate career in 1975, just after graduating from law school—from the University of Wisconsin—where he also studied as an undergraduate. That year he joined the Office of Legislative Counsel as assistant counsel. Over the years, Jim Fransen gradually moved up the ranks until he was named legislative counsel, a position he has held for 15 years.

He is a noted expert on a lot of things, but especially the United States Tax Code. We have heard speeches on this floor about the complexity of the Tax Code. That is a monumental assignment, to understand the Tax Code. Jim certainly does, perhaps better than anyone in Washington. Jim actually wrote the Tax Reform Act of 1986. That was the famous Bradley-Gephardt legislation.

For four decades, he has played a role in every important piece of tax legislation that has become law in our country. The Office of Legislative Counsel does the work for the Senate—not Democrats, not Republicans, but all of us, including our staffs. They write bills to create programs while also drafting amendments that will have some effect on these programs, sometimes wiping out these programs. This impartiality is the key to the success of the Senate and something we don't often consider—how we get to the point where we are.

This massive bill we are going to deal with today has legislative counsel's imprint on it. The same can be said of the bill they are going to work on today in the House, the omnibus; the tax extenders, the same thing. These are the must-do's we have to do before we leave here.

Another key to the success of Jim Fransen is the excellent team he has put together in the Office of Legislative Counsel. The staff, under his watchful eye, receives about 15,000 legislative inquiries every year—15,000—well more than 1,000 a month, and they are responsible for drafting 98 percent of all the legislation we do.

(Mr. WALSH assumed the Chair.)

It is rare to find someone like former Senator Jim Webb, who was a freshman Senator who came in and drafted his own bill that would give educational benefits to the military. Senator Webb came to me and said: I am going to write my own bill. Now that doesn't happen very often, but it was extremely important to him that he did that, and it had to be done because it was a significant piece to the new GI bill of rights, which the Presiding Officer—the General—would certainly understand. But 98 percent of the work we do here is not stamped by Jim Webb. We depend upon Jim Fransen's office to do this. So his job is not an easy job, but he has excelled because of his knowledge of the law, his experience of the legislative process, his patience, and his impeccable character.

Jim Fransen is a man of integrity and one who considers everyone's views, whether he personally agrees with them or not. It is no wonder Jim is the second longest serving legislative counsel in the history of the Senate. One of his admirers once told me: Jim always plays it way up here, while the rest of us are down here. His phone rings at all hours of the day and night with random requests, and Jim handles it all with class and dignity.

Jim is retiring from the Senate at the end of this month. He will be missed, and that is an understatement, but he leaves with us an Office of Legislative Counsel that has never performed better. I thank him for his service, and I do this on behalf of the entire Senate family. I thank his family for the untold hours he has spent away from home. I appreciate the work his wife Margaret Ann has done in supporting him, and, of course, he will spend more time with his three daughters and two grandsons. So thanks very much for sharing this good man with us.

I wish Jim the very best in his retirement, and I repeat, I thank him on behalf of the Senate family for all the work he has done.

 DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, as I indicated, we are going to move to the defense bill, but we are going to also, as part of that bill, do something that is at least 10 years overdue. For the last 10 years, we have been struggling to get bills out of the energy committee. We are fortunate enough to get them out once in a while, but they are stymied here on the floor. That has been going on for 10 years. There has been a permanent wrecking crew, led by one person, to do this.

Before Nevada was settled by pioneers, its mountains were home to thousands of bighorn sheep—we still have lots of them—and pronghorn antelope—we have the largest antelope herd in the entire world in northern Nevada—and Nevada's streams and lakes at one time were full of Lahontan and cutthroat trout. That is not the case anymore.

Because of the growth in the State of Nevada there has been a tremendous impact on the environment. We had in Nevada salmon in our rivers, but not anymore. We are trying to replenish fish so that we will have more of what we did have before, including salmon. Like every State across the Nation, Nevada's natural and cultural heritage has come under immense pressure as our cities and populations have swelled.

About 80 percent of the people now live in one of our 17 counties. Clark County is where Las Vegas is. The other 16 counties make up about 20 percent of the population. So the pressure, especially because of what has happened in southern Nevada, has been very difficult on the environment.

The other thing people have to understand is that 87 percent of the State of Nevada is owned by the Federal Government. That creates a lot of issues—some positive, some negative. But with the population having swelled, some of the issues we are now experiencing are certainly to be expected. As our society continues to expand, the stresses on our land, our wildlife, and water resources will continue.

That is why the package of land bills in this National Defense Authorization Act is vitally important to our country. The package is a compromise that protects our Nation's wild and scenic places, our Nation's unique history, and opens up other lands for development.

Are there provisions in this bill that I don't care a great deal about in a positive fashion? Yes. There are things in this bill I don't like. But there are things in here I do like. Are there things in this bill the majority of Republicans probably don't like? The answer is yes. So this is what legislation is all about. It is about compromise. It is about working together to have an end product, and that is what we have here.

This compromise is a chance for the Senate to get something done. Compromise has been wanting in this body, especially regarding matters of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Hundreds of bills for the last 10 years have been stopped.

I am only offering my opinion, but one of the finest public servants I have ever served with is Jeff Bingaman from New Mexico. Jeff is an absolutely brilliant man, a hard worker. I would bet—and I don't bet very often, and I am sure no one will take me up on this—but I think one reason Jeff Bingaman left the Senate was because of the work he was unable to get done in his committee. What a good chairman he was,