

the deputy whip team and helped consult with and helped inform our colleagues in a way that has helped us to actually get legislation passed by unifying us.

Suffice it to say Senator COATS is a true diplomat wherever he goes, and this Chamber has been a better, more civil place with him in it.

I know DAN would be the first to tell us that his decades of public service were made possible because of the equal partner he has in his wife Marsha. They met in college. They have been married more than 50 years, and they are a great example to all of us. So thanks to Marsha and their children and grandchildren for sharing DAN all these years.

I have a suspicion that Senator COATS doesn't have it in him to step totally away from public service, and there has been some news and discussion as to whether he might be in the running for another important position, perhaps in the next administration. I know we all look forward to seeing where he goes next to serve our country, which we know is so important to him.

DAVID VITTER

Mr. President, I would also like to say a few words about the senior Senator from Louisiana, DAVID VITTER. Back in the 113th Congress, in 2013, I began my tenure as the Republican whip, and at the same time I invited Senator VITTER to serve the conference as a deputy whip. One thing we always know about DAVID VITTER, whether you are a colleague, a staffer, or a constituent, is that no matter what, he is going to have thought carefully about the issue in ways that perhaps surprise many of us, and when he has something to say about an issue, it is always something worth listening to. I can't say that about all of us, but certainly Senator VITTER adds to the value of our deliberations every time he speaks.

But, of course, nothing is closer to his heart than the people of Louisiana, and what he has done diligently and faithfully here is serve the people of his State. I have had the pleasure of working with him on issues we share in common, like coastal protection issues that affect both of our States with our gulf coast.

Senator VITTER was sworn into office the same year Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans. As a matter of fact, for a time, he and his family literally lived outside the Houston area because of the devastation wrought by that terrible hurricane—a storm that FEMA called the “single most catastrophic natural disaster in U.S. history.” Katrina did billions of dollars' worth of damage, killed almost 2,000 people, left thousands without a roof over their heads, and cut the population of New Orleans in half. About 100,000 of those, I am told, made permanent residence in Texas, having had their homes destroyed.

I know Senator VITTER took this devastation as a personal challenge. He hit

the ground running. When the people of Louisiana needed him most, he worked at every level of government to bring them together and get the help they needed. Of course, just a few years after Katrina, Hurricane Ike pummeled its way through the Gulf Coast of Mexico before making landfall on the Texas coast. So I have had a number of opportunities to work with Senator VITTER not only on recovery efforts for our States but to make sure our communities along the coast stand ready to help each other and particularly as we prepare for future storms.

I wish him and his wife Wendy and their entire family well as they look to more adventures and more opportunities to serve. I have no doubt he will continue to take his passion for helping the people of Louisiana with him wherever the future may lead.

MARK KIRK

Finally, Mr. President, I wish to recognize the senior Senator from Illinois, MARK KIRK. If my colleagues have noticed Senator KIRK's interests on the floor, they will notice a trend. In addition to supporting measures that help the people of Illinois, he is laser-focused on keeping America safe. He provides us a declassified situation map that shows us where the U.S. military is engaged in fighting the War on Terror in the Middle East and in Africa.

He is a former member of the U.S. Navy, and so he has worked long and hard to strengthen our military at every turn. He has been a thoughtful and vocal critic of some of our Nation's biggest adversaries, like North Korea and Iran. MARK has never been one to shy away from more sanctions or steeper penalties for those countries if it means the United States will be safer as a result. To put it simply, MARK KIRK is a great patriot.

We all know his personal story of overcoming a stroke and his great perseverance and fortitude. It really has been an inspiration to watch MARK as he has recovered from that devastating stroke and continued to be an enormously productive Senator on behalf of the State of Illinois.

It has been a joy to see him turn that difficult circumstance into a rallying cry to help others get the best care and rehabilitation available today.

So I am personally grateful to Senator KIRK for many things, but in particular I want to mention his strong support of anti-human trafficking legislation. I joined him in Chicago a few years ago to speak with law enforcement about the connections between organized crime and sex trafficking. MARK has never wavered from his support for important legislation that we passed here this last year called the Justice for Victims of Trafficking Act. He understood right from the beginning that human trafficking was essentially modern-day slavery, targeting, as it did, vulnerable children—typically a child of 12 to 14 years old who has run away from home, only to find themselves unable to leave because

they have become a victim of slavery. So I am thankful to Senator KIRK for standing up for the victims of human trafficking and taking care of and prioritizing our veterans and service men and women.

Let me close by saying thank you again to our friends Senator KIRK, Senator VITTER, Senator COATS, and Senator AYOTTE for the indelible mark and contributions they made to the Senate and my sincere appreciation for how they have faithfully served our country. I am grateful for their friendship and wish them and their families well as they tackle new ventures ahead.

I will just close by saying we have another colleague who has been nominated to serve as Attorney General, who still has to go through the process of confirmation and advice and consent by the Senate. That, of course, would be the senior Senator from Alabama, Mr. SESSIONS—not to jinx him; I will wait until that process is concluded, but I will be back here speaking about him at the appropriate time.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, for debate only, until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I would like to have a colloquy with my colleague.

It is my understanding that Senator CARPER was interested in 5 minutes, Senator MERKLEY was interested in 5 minutes, I was interested in 5 minutes, and I think Senator ENZI was interested in 5 minutes.

Could I ask my colleague if he would amend his UC so that each of those four Senators would have 5 minutes? I think that would take us to about 3:10, as opposed to 3 o'clock.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I would like to accommodate my friend from Washington, but the House message containing the continuing resolution is due here at 3 o'clock. There are a number of procedural matters that need to be attended to, so we will have Senators coming to the floor for that purpose. I am told that after that process occurs, which shouldn't take very long,

the floor will be wide open for Senators to speak as long as they like.

I object to the modification.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the original request?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Oregon.

FORESTRY POLICY

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am speaking in morning business with my colleague and friend Senator MERKLEY to talk about forestry policy and to give the Senate a little bit of an update on where we are because we have so many resource-dependent communities that have been devastated as a result of a variety of policies. I want to touch briefly, and then yield to Senator MERKLEY, on what some of those elements are.

No. 1 is that our softwood lumber producers are now in a titanic battle with the Canadians, fighting the Canadian system of heavily subsidizing their industry, thereby cutting ours. A group of 25 Senators—a quarter of the Senate—have joined me in an effort so that our trade representative pushes back and continues to fight this unjust, inequitable system until we no longer see Oregon and American jobs destroyed as a result of the Canadians' unfairly subsidizing their industry.

No. 2, we feel very strongly about getting the harvest up in a sustainable fashion. We know there is an awful lot of work to do in the woods. We can do it with an environmental ethic, with an ethic of forest health, and I strongly support that. I have introduced legislation to do that in my home State and have been supportive of colleagues' efforts to do it in their parts of the country.

The reality is—and the Forest Service has said this—you would have to increase logging on our public lands by 400 percent in order to no longer need a third leg of the forestry stool, which is the Secure Rural Schools program.

I want it understood that we are going to push back against inequitable trade practices that are hurting jobs in rural Oregon and rural America. We are going to support increasing the harvest in a sustainable fashion, but there is no realistic increase that might possibly win passage here in Washington and be upheld legally that involves taking the harvest up to 400 percent. You are going to need a safety net.

Senator MERKLEY and I, Senator CRAPO, Senator RISCH, and many colleagues on both sides of the aisle have fought to get this program, which has now expired, extended for one more year. This program began in 2000 as a result of a bipartisan piece of legislation, which Senator Craig and I authored, called the Secure Rural Schools bill. It now benefits more than 700 counties, and we see it benefiting communities all over the country. This program is depended on for education. It is depended on for roads. It is de-

pendent on in many areas for law enforcement. Unfortunately, our colleagues have not been willing to extend it. Senator MERKLEY and I, and Senator CRAPO and Senator RISCH, in a bipartisan way, have wanted to work in the Senate to get this extended, but to put these vital county payments on the back burner would be an enormous mistake.

I want to yield the remainder of our time to my friend and colleague, but there are really three legs to this stool: fight unfair trade practices, get the harvest up in a sustainable kind of fashion, and understand that you are not going to be able to meet the needs of hard-hit rural communities without the safety net program—the Secure Rural Schools program.

Senator CRAPO, Senator RISCH, Senator MERKLEY, and I are going to keep coming back here again and again until we get it reauthorized.

I yield the remainder of our time to Senator MERKLEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Oregon, who, back in the year 2000, fought so hard to right a wrong. The wrong was that a variety of measures related to these timbered acres reduced the ability to pull as much harvest off as in the past. Part of that was the fact that there was simply a lot of second growth that wasn't ready to be cut yet. Another was a variety of rules related to environmental protections, to forest fire prevention. There were a whole series of things.

The bottom line is that these counties, which originally had these lands before they transferred them to Federal Government for safekeeping, are dependent upon revenue from the timber sales on these lands. My colleague pointed out that those timber sales simply can't operate at the same level to provide the resources those counties operated on. Much as with Payments in Lieu of Taxes, or the PILT program, we stepped in—my colleague stepped in and led the effort to honor the promise made to those counties. We have been doing so now for 16 years.

One of the challenges that has emerged is that we reauthorize it only for a short period of time. We say we will still honor the promise but only for a year or only for 2 years, which means the counties never know what is going to be coming. They are really caught in limbo. Because they are rural counties—they don't have a great amount of manufacturing; a lot of the counties don't have a lot of farmland—they are really dependent upon the forest industry as the heart of their economy. This is very important to them.

We need to honor the promise to these counties, just as we have through the PILT program. It is a situation we can debate at whatever level that should be, but it needs to be a long-term commitment to this promise to

these counties. Remember, these were county lands that were transferred back to the Federal Government to essentially hold in trust for them.

I share with my colleague the desire that we address this in a fashion that provides a strong foundation, a strong commitment to the promise made to rural America, to rural forested counties. As mentioned, 720 counties in 41 States—that is a pretty significant deal across the country. We need to act, and we need to act now.

I turn this back over to my colleague.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am going to wrap this up simply by saying a program like this has generated a tremendous amount of community involvement. There are advisory committees that bring the industry and environmental folks together. That is what we are going to need to get this job done right. It is called collaborative forestry. The Secure Rural Schools program is something that Senator MERKLEY and I want to reauthorize. It is a textbook case for what you want to do for collaborative forestry.

We didn't even really get into forest health because we all know our forests, particularly in the West, are burning up, so Senator RISCH, Senator CRAPO, and I went into something called fire borrowing, which is an extraordinarily inefficient policy that discourages prevention with respect to fire.

We are going to be back to talk about the nuts and bolts of sensible forest policy. We need to build on this collaborative effort, as we have sought to do in our O&C bill—the bill that Senator MERKLEY and I have been involved with—which will double the harvest, on average, for the next 50 years, according to the experts. We want it to be understood that we are going to be fighting on a number of fronts. We will fight with respect to the trade policy, which is long overdue, as it relates to getting a fair shake for our softwood lumber producers and value-added forestry. We are going to focus on collaborative approaches and get the harvest up in a sustainable way.

Senator MERKLEY has talked about the promise of Secure Rural Schools, and I feel it is very regrettable that when Senator CRAPO and Senator RISCH tried to convince the other side of the aisle to accept Secure Rural Schools now, we couldn't get it done.

I think anybody who knows us knows we are persistent, and you don't get anything important done without bipartisan support. That is the way we will approach our forestry policy in the days ahead.

I yield the floor.

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. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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