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Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.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.

Eternal Father and Sovereign King, as our lawmakers prepare for another chapter in our legislative history, bless those who will be leaving us and those who will be coming. Give them wisdom and courage for the living of these days.

May Your gift of wisdom provide them with a guide for the unknown way, enabling them to approve things that are excellent. Remind them that the most important choices demand the ability to discriminate not only good from bad but the best from the better and the good.

May Your gift of courage empower our Senators to permit their reach to exceed their grasp for the glory and honor of Your Name.

Lord, continue to extend Your mercies to the Members of the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA.

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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

WILDFIRES IN CALIFORNIA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I would like to begin by recognizing the brave fire and rescue personnel who are working around the clock to stop the spread of fires in California. I know all of our colleagues join me in remembering the more than 40 people who have lost their lives to the blaze, in sympathy for their families and in prayer for all of those whose homes, lives, and livelihoods have been thrown into chaos by this disaster.

As these communities begin the task of rebuilding, Americans everywhere will stand with them.

WELCOMING OUR NEW COLLEAGUES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, this is an exciting week for the Senate. For one thing, we are beginning to welcome several new Members to our ranks. They may not be sworn in until January, but these new Senators-elect are already arriving in town for orientation events and to vote in their party's leadership elections.

I know I speak for all of my colleagues in issuing each of our future colleagues, on both sides of the aisle, our hearty congratulations and a warm welcome. We are looking forward to working with all of these new colleagues.

UPCOMING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, even as we begin looking ahead to January and the 116th Congress, the reality is, we still have a series of important outstanding subjects to tackle between now and the end of the year. First on the list is legislation that will reauthorize funding for our Coast Guard and implement a number of important reforms.

Our Nation calls on the Coast Guard to protect America's ports and to

maintain shipping lanes to interdict illegal drugs before they reach the border and to risk their lives to save others in the midst of fierce storms and natural disasters. In each case, they embody their motto: "Semper Paratus"—"Always Ready."

So in passing these measures this week, the Senate will be fulfilling an important promise to some of the brave men and women who have taken an oath to keep us safe.

Aspects of this legislation are particularly important to States like my own State of Kentucky—the heart of our Nation's inland waterways system. For too long, vessel owners and barge operators have struggled under a complex system of overlapping and duplicative regulations. They make normal shipping functions needlessly difficult, including the incidental discharge of ballast water. A confusing web of rules from States, the Coast Guard, and the EPA leave owners and operators to face constant uncertainty and lead to higher costs.

The Vessel Incidental Discharge Act, or VIDA, replaces the existing system with a uniform, cost-effective, and national standard enforced by the Coast Guard.

For the 13,000 Kentuckians whose jobs depend on our State's inland waterways, this provision can help cut costs, promote efficiency, and protect our natural waters. For the countless farmers, miners, and manufacturers who depend on these waters to get their goods to market, VIDA ends the headache and delivers relief.

VIDA passed out of the Senate Commerce Committee on a voice vote. In fact, it has been reported out of committee numerous times in recent years, including when our Democratic colleagues were in the majority. So it is time to pass this bipartisan bill; it is time to help the Coast Guard continue its important work; and it is time to deliver much needed predictability to the mariners who rely on it. I urge

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



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