

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The majority leader is recognized.

WELCOMING OUR NEW COLLEAGUES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we continue to welcome our new Senators-elect, who are in town this week for orientation meetings and votes on party leadership. Yesterday evening, the Democratic leader and I had the honor of toasting our future colleagues at our traditional bipartisan welcome dinner.

It is quite a distinguished group. Some of our new colleagues are talented legislators who will simply be relocating from the other side of the Capitol. Some are coming to the Senate as private citizens who have built successful careers outside the world of politics. Some have already served as statewide elected officials and are coming to Washington for the first time.

It is our pleasure to welcome these future Senators and congratulate all of them.

LEADERSHIP VOTES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, speaking of looking ahead, just a few hours ago our Republican conference came together and chose the leadership team that will serve for the 116th Congress.

Our Republican leadership team will feature faces both new and familiar. We are looking forward to earning our colleagues' trust and working as hard as we can to seize the opportunities that will lie before us this coming Congress.

It is my honor to have been asked by my colleagues to continue serving as leader. I can honestly say that not a day goes by when I am not humbled and honored by this opportunity to serve my colleagues, the institution of the Senate, and our incredible country in whatever measure I am capable.

I know my friend the Democratic leader feels much the same. I want to congratulate him on his election as leader once again. I look forward to working with him and his colleagues to move the ball and to make bipartisan progress for the American people.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now, on to the work that is currently before us: We voted yesterday to advance important legislation that will preserve our national security, ensure our readiness, and expand economic opportunity. The bill before us to reauthorize the Coast Guard funding will ensure that the brave men and women who put themselves in harm's way every single day have access to the resources they need.

America calls on our Coast Guard to protect our ports, to protect our

coasts, to safeguard the shipping lanes that enable American commerce, to stem the tide of illegal drugs before they reach our shores, and to brave even the fiercest natural disasters that save American lives. They always answer the call. They are always ready. So it is our obligation as a Congress to keep the Coast Guard authorized and adequately resourced to do the job.

When we pass the legislation before us, we will do just that, and we will do even more because this bill also includes important reforms that will streamline needlessly complicated government regulations and help communities and small businesses harness the great resource that is America's waterways.

In my home State of Kentucky alone, we have 1,900-plus miles of navigable waterways. They support 13,000 jobs. This bill includes a major victory for those Kentuckians and for Americans in a number of other States.

The Vessel Incidental Discharge Act will unwind the confusing, redundant tangle of rules and regulations that States, the EPA, and the Coast Guard have all piled on to vessel owners and barge operators who are, frankly, just trying to make a living. With this legislation, that tangled mess will go away. It will be replaced by a single, efficient, and uniform standard, which the Coast Guard will enforce. It is a commonsense step, and it is something that has been thoroughly bipartisan.

This legislation passed the Commerce Committee on a voice vote. It has actually been reported out several different times, including when the Senate was controlled by Democrats. So I look forward to delivering these important measures for the Coast Guard, for Kentuckians, and for many more Americans when we pass this legislation later today.

NOMINATION OF MICHELLE BOWMAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, we will also vote to advance the nomination of Michelle Bowman to serve on the Federal Reserve Board. Ms. Bowman brings experience as a community banker and as a banking regulator, currently serving as the State Banking Commissioner of Kansas. Her nomination comes before us in a year when the Senate has taken substantive legislative action on behalf of America's community banks and the communities they serve.

As we were reminded when we passed bipartisan reforms to Dodd-Frank a few months ago, smaller lenders provide more than 50 percent of small business loans and nearly 80 percent of agricultural loans nationwide. So it is as important now as ever that these institutions and their needs are represented on the Federal Reserve Board.

By any standard, Ms. Bowman is very well prepared to serve in a seat designated specifically for an expert on community banking. So I urge each of

my colleagues to join me in voting to confirm another of the President's well-qualified nominees for Federal service.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, it is my understanding that the distinguished Democratic leader will be coming in soon to participate in leadership time, but until such time, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate on the Coast Guard bill for 5 minutes.

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

COAST GUARD REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, as the Presiding Officer entered the Chamber and took the Chair, I was explaining to Members what the Coast Guard does—all the various vital activities they do to provide for the safety and security of Americans. Let me tell my colleagues just a few things this bill does. The distinguished majority leader was discussing this in his remarks also.

This bill that we are about to vote on takes big steps in recapitalizing our vessel fleet. I am proud to say that shipbuilders across the country, including in my State of Mississippi, are rebuilding our fleet. In Mississippi, we have built six national security cutters that are currently operational. The seventh and eighth ships have been built and are scheduled to be commissioned next year. These ships are some of the most technologically advanced vessels in the world.

The Coast Guard needs more modern national security cutters to combat transnational organized crime. These cutters make up the backbone of this effort, and, as we know, the criminals who undermine our borders and our Nation's social and political development are not contained by borders.

In addition, the Coast Guard bill recognizes the importance of national security cutters by authorizing multiyear contracts that will lead to procurement of a 10th, 11th, and 12th vessel. So we are making great progress there. These cutters are highly advanced patrol boats that could deploy independently for a number of missions along our ports, waterways, and coasts.

In addition, the bill does not overlook the Coast Guard's shoreline infrastructure, instead authorizing more than \$170 million for these facilities. This includes steps to repair and replace its aging rotary-wing aircraft.

Other provisions in the bill would clarify the Coast Guard's role in national security as a member of our Armed Forces, and they are and should be clarified as a member of the Armed Forces; establish a land-based, unmanned aircraft system program; help modernize the Coast Guard's healthcare system; enable block-buy contracts for ship acquisition; and conduct an advanced maintenance program for the Polar Star, our only