

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

REMEMBERING SAM SMITH

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the life of Sam Smith from Las Vegas, NV. Mr. Smith passed away last month.

Mr. Smith was a retired firefighter and the founder of the bookstore and treasured community establishment, Native Son. Native Son operated in West Las Vegas for 17 years, and throughout that time Mr. Smith was its heart and soul. Mr. Smith offered free math and reading classes and helped many students prepare for fire department entrance exams. He had a saying, "People who study calculus don't go to jail." Mr. Smith cared about the people in his community, and he worked to improve their lives.

Mr. Smith helped people like Trina Jiles become the first Black woman in the Clark County Fire Department. When she came into Native Son in 1995 he told her there were no Black women firefighters and asked how many push-ups she could do. When she did 20, he told her she would be all right and began teaching her in his free math and reading classes. Soon after, she passed all of her tests and became Clark County's first Black female firefighter. She went on to work her way up the department to become an arson investigator.

Through his years of service, Sam Smith was a fixture in the West Las Vegas community. I appreciate all he has done, and I celebrate his life.

CONSERVING LA MOSQUITIA

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I want to briefly draw the Senate's attention to a recent announcement made by Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández concerning his government's efforts to secure and preserve a newly discovered archaeological site in the eastern part of his country. The area is part of La Mosquitia, a large swath of tropical rain forest along the Mosquito Coast in eastern Honduras, which also extends into northeastern Nicaragua.

Reaching the remote forest is accomplished primarily by air or water, and it was airborne sensing technology in 2012 that first uncovered the ancient site, now revealed to be as much as 1,000 years old. The site is believed by some to be the location of the mythic White City, a safe haven where indigenous populations took refuge from Spanish conquistadores. However, archaeologists Christopher Fisher of Colorado State University and Oscar Neil Cruz of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History and ethno-botanist Mark Plotkin of the Amazon Conservation Team who reached the site earlier this month believe the dis-

covery could be even more significant as just one of many sites that may reveal an entire lost civilization.

La Mosquitia is also the home of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage Site that has twice been placed on UNESCO's world heritage in danger list, most recently in 2011. The designation was the result of an investigation that revealed rampant deforestation, primarily by cattle herders seeking to meet the demand for beef in the United States, in addition to illegal hunting and fishing. Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve's designation is that it is representative of the threats to all of La Mosquitia.

That is why President Hernández's announcement is so important. La Mosquitia is not just a treasure of the Honduran people; it has preserved centuries of cultural artifacts and is now home to a multitude of plant and animal life that has remained largely undisturbed by the outside world.

President Hernández's commitment to preserve these archeological sites from looters and other criminal activity and to protect the broader forest area by replanting the jungle and countering deforestation deserves our support. I look forward to working with the Government of Honduras on how the United States may be able to assist its conservation efforts.

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a copy of my remarks at the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

We're here today to review the president's fiscal year 2016 budget request for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the independent federal agency responsible for regulating the safety of our nation's commercial nuclear power plants and other nuclear materials.

This is the first time in many years that the subcommittee has held a hearing to examine the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's budget.

It is also the first of several hearings that the subcommittee will hold this year on nuclear power. These hearings are important because nuclear power provides about 20 percent of our nation's electricity and more than 60 percent of our carbon-free electricity.

I plan to focus my questions today on four main areas:

1. Licensing nuclear waste repositories;
2. Avoiding excessive regulations;
3. Licensing for new and existing reactors; and
4. Making sure the agency is running effectively

First, we must solve the 25-year-old stalemate about what to do with used fuel from our nuclear reactors to ensure that nuclear power has a strong future in this country.

Later this year, I will reintroduce bipartisan legislation with Senators Feinstein,

Murkowski and perhaps others, to create both temporary and permanent storage sites for nuclear waste. Also, Senator Feinstein and I plan to include a pilot program for nuclear waste storage in the Energy and Water appropriations bill, as we have for the past three years.

The new sites we'd seek to establish through the legislation Senator Feinstein and I are reintroducing this year would not take the place of Yucca Mountain—we have more than enough waste to fill Yucca Mountain to its legal capacity—but rather would complement it.

This legislation is consistent with the president's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future.

But let me be clear: Yucca Mountain can and should be part of the solution. Federal law designates Yucca Mountain as the nation's repository for used nuclear fuel.

The Nuclear Waste Fund, which is money that utilities have paid the government to dispose of their used nuclear fuel, has a balance of about \$36 billion and there are still several steps to go in the licensing process for Yucca Mountain.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has a balance of unspent funding that you are supposed to use to continue the licensing process. But more resources will be required, so I think it's fair to ask the question:

Knowing that there are additional steps and they will cost money, why would you not request additional funds in your budget?

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission recently completed the Safety Evaluation Report that said Yucca Mountain met all of the safety requirements through "the period of geologic stability."

The commission and the Environmental Protection Agency define the "period of geologic stability" as one million years. To continue to oppose Yucca Mountain because of radiation concerns is to ignore science—as well as the law.

The next steps on Yucca Mountain include completing a supplemental environmental impact statement and restarting the hearings before the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, which were suspended in September 2011.

Money is available for these activities, and I want to hear why there is no request to use it.

Federal law requires that nuclear power plants be built safely, but the law doesn't say it should be so hard and expensive to build and operate reactors that you can't do it.

A 2013 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that up to 25 of our 99 nuclear reactors could close by 2020.

The decision to close a reactor could be due to a number of factors, including the low price of natural gas, and the wasteful wind production tax credit, which is so generous that in some markets wind producers can literally give their electricity away and still make a profit.

But the decision to close a reactor can also have to do with excessive and unnecessary regulations. I want to work with the commission to address this.

Over the next several decades, most of our 99 nuclear reactors will go through the commission's license renewal process to extend their licenses, which is critical to the future of nuclear power. I want to make sure that the commission is prepared for this additional work.

I also want to make sure the commission has devoted the appropriate resources to the licensing process to keep new reactors—like Watts Bar 2 in Tennessee—on time and on budget.

I have proposed that we build 100 new reactors, which may seem excessive, but not if