

and telling anybody who will listen that this way forward is the right way forward on Cuba; that we should change our policies; that we ought to have closer cooperation and diplomatic relations; and that the problems that Cuba has are the problems of the Cuban Government, not the Cuban people.

I want to pay tribute to Alan Gross for that. He continues to work till this day for better relations between Cuba and the United States. That is a significant thing. When Senator TOM UDALL and I visited Alan Gross in prison in November of last year, just 1 month prior to his release, he was in a bad way. He had lost a lot of weight. He had lost some of his teeth. It was a tough time to be in prison. Being there for 5 years, he missed many events at home with his family.

I cannot imagine coming out of that experience and still feeling the compassion that he has for the Cuban people. Just last night it was announced that the U.S. and Cuba have agreed to enter into a bilateral agreement on flights to allow airlines from America, U.S. carriers to fly to Cuba. Instead of just charter flights, we will now have directly scheduled flights. That will allow Americans to travel to Cuba easier and more inexpensively.

I would encourage all Americans who can find themselves in 1 of the 12 categories for travel to do so. There are a group of Cubans who came to the United States a while ago. They were asked: What can America do for you? These were Cuban entrepreneurs who are looking to change the system in Cuba.

They said: Visit Cuba. Come see us. Come to our private restaurants. Stay in our homes. Spend money in Cuba that we have access to. I should note that those who oppose a new policy—the new policy that we have with Cuba—often say that if you travel to Cuba, every dime that you spend goes right to the Cuban Government. That is not the case.

In Cuba right now, you can stay at a bed and breakfast. In fact, Airbnb has 2,500 listings in Cuba. You can stay at an Airbnb. The bulk of that money, most of that goes to those Cubans who are hosting you, not the Cuban Government. You can eat at a private restaurant where those who prepare the meal, serve the meal, and cook the meals will see the bulk of that money to them.

In fact, about 20 percent of the Cuban workforce is now outside of the Cuban Government. So, when Americans travel to Cuba, Cubans benefit. So I would encourage my colleagues and others to take the opportunity to go down to Cuba and travel. The policy that we had for 54 years in Cuba failed to produce the results that we want to see. We want to see a democratic Cuba that respects human rights.

The Cuban Government still has a long way to go, but I truly believe that the best way forward, the best way to make progress on those areas that we

still need to make progress on, is with full diplomatic relations. Hopefully, we soon will have an Ambassador in Cuba who is the Ambassador. Our diplomatic team, led by Jeff DeLaurentis, does a great job in Cuba, but we ought to have a U.S. Ambassador there.

Americans traveling to Cuba doing legal business in Cuba ought to have the same protections they have anywhere else in the world. We need good representation, full representation, in countries that are not friendly to us more than we need it in countries that are friendly to us. So I would encourage the Obama administration to move forward on those and other areas as well.

There are still some measures the Obama administration can take that will improve the lives of Cubans and make it more likely that we can make progress in these other areas. Having said that, let me just say—you often don't hear it from this side of the aisle—but I want to praise and applaud this President, President Obama, for taking the measures that he has taken on Cuba. It took guts to do so.

There is still opposition to the positions that he has taken, but he has taken a position that helps the Cuban people, and it helps Americans. It is good for our national interests. It is good for our security interests.

With that, I want to thank again the Senator from Vermont for the work that he has done on this issue. It has been a pleasure working with him. This past year has been a great year in terms of U.S.-Cuba relations. Here is to an even better year ahead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 2029

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate receives a message from the House to accompany H.R. 2029, the majority leader be recognized to make a motion to concur in the House amendments; further, that if a cloture motion is filed on that motion, that notwithstanding rule XXII, the Senate immediately vote on the motion to invoke cloture; that if cloture is invoked, all postcloture time be yielded back, the majority leader or his designee be recognized to make a motion to table the first House amendment; that following the disposition of that motion and if a budget point of order is raised, the majority leader or his designee be recognized to make a motion to waive the point of order and that following disposition of that motion, the Senate then vote on the motion to concur in the House amendments with no further motions or amendments in order unless the motion to table is successful or the budget point of order is sustained, and with 2 minutes of debate equally divided in the usual form prior to each vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. No objection.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Maine.

PROTECTING AMERICANS FROM TAX HIKES ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, tomorrow the Senate will vote on the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act of 2015, which will provide needed tax certainty and predictability for our Nation's small businesses, enabling them to create more jobs and boost our economy.

Several months ago, on April 30, I was joined by my friend and colleague from Pennsylvania, Senator CASEY, in introducing the Small Business Tax Certainty and Growth Act of 2015. Our bill aimed to help small businesses invest, grow, and create jobs by providing needed tax relief and certainty. Senator CASEY has been a true partner in advancing this bill, and we are so pleased that the Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes Act takes three key provisions from our bipartisan bill. These provisions include, first, the permanent extension of section 179 expensing, indexed for inflation, which will allow small businesses to write off up to \$500,000 of the cost of certain equipment. I would note that this provision is so important to our smaller businesses that it is the No. 1 tax priority of our Nation's largest small business advocacy group, the National Federation of Independent Business. Second, the bill includes the permanent extension of the 15-year deduction period for restaurants and retailers to improve their space and to buy new equipment. This is so important because otherwise the Tax Code reverts to a 39-year depreciation schedule. That is totally unrealistic. No restaurant could wait 39 years before investing in new flooring, new equipment, and other kinds of renovations and expect that customers will still come flocking to their doors. The third provision of our bill would be an extension of so-called bonus depreciation to allow companies to deduct the cost of certain equipment and software.

These three provisions will give our small businesses the predictability they require to plan for capital investments that are vital to expansion and job creation.

I know I don't have to tell the Presiding Officer that small businesses create the majority of new jobs in this country. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, small businesses generated 63 percent of net new jobs that were created between 1993 and 2013. Even the smallest firms had a notable effect on our economy. The Small Business Administration data indicate that businesses with fewer than 20 employees accounted for 18 percent of all private sector jobs in 2013.