

completion of the statements by the Senators from Indiana, Connecticut, Minnesota, and any other members of the committee wishing to do so—that at that point, I have 10 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I have been told it is only going to take a minute to run a hotline on the Democratic side, after which I would like to propound, on behalf of myself and Senator BIDEN, a unanimous consent agreement. This whole matter will take just a minute or so. I would like to, with the consent of my colleagues, get that out of the way here before the debate continues, if the Senator from Vermont finds that acceptable.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, the Senator has this consent request. I hope he will offer it and we can consider it, if the leadership so desires. I would certainly support it. Can't we wait until we get the agreement?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida has the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY. I object then.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, let me restate my unanimous consent, which is that upon the completion of the opening statements of the members of the committee, I be allowed 10 minutes as in morning business for a statement on the wildfires in Florida.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WELLSTONE. Mr. President, I will not object. I just say to my colleague, I am pleased to speak right after him. I just ask that other colleagues will speak, and I would like to speak after the Senator from Florida.

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

The Senator from Connecticut is recognized.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, let me thank my colleague from Florida for his graciousness. For the purposes of getting the opening statements out, it is worthwhile to hear those who have worked over the past year or more to put this piece of legislation together.

Let me begin by commending the distinguished chairman of the committee, Senator JEFFORDS of Vermont, and the distinguished ranking Democrat, Senator KENNEDY, and my colleague from Indiana, Senator COATS, for their tremendous efforts here to put this higher education bill together.

Mr. President, there are very few pieces of legislation that we will consider in this Congress that are as important to American families as the one we take up today.

I see my colleague from Kentucky. Does he wish me to yield?

Mr. McCONNELL. If the Senator will yield for a moment, the unanimous consent agreement has now been cleared.

Mr. DODD. Without interrupting the flow of the debate and without yielding

my right to the floor, for the purposes of propounding the unanimous consent agreement, I will yield to the Senator from Kentucky.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 2282

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at 2 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. 2282, which I send to the desk, and that it be considered under the following agreement: 2 hours on the bill, equally divided between myself and Senator BIDEN or our designees; that no motions or amendments be in order; that following the conclusion or yielding back of the time, the bill be advanced to third reading, and the Senate proceed to vote on passage of the bill, all without any intervening action or debate.

Mr. BIDEN. Mr. President, that has been cleared on the Democratic side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DODD. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky has the floor. Is there objection?

Mr. KENNEDY. Reserving the right to object—

Mr. DODD. I will object for a moment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Who seeks recognition?

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the 10 minutes I reserved previously be available to me at this time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Florida is recognized.

FLORIDA'S FIRE CRISIS

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I am here with a sense of disappointment in that the President of the United States today is visiting my State and, particularly, visiting areas of the State that have recently been ravaged by an unprecedented series of wildfires. I regret that because of the schedule of the Senate, particularly the votes we have just taken this morning and those we will take later in the day, I was unable to accept the President's invitation, which he had generously extended to my colleague, Senator MACK, and myself. Therefore, I would like to take

this opportunity to make a statement to my colleagues as to the circumstances in Florida.

Mr. President, next month—on August 24—Floridians will observe the sixth anniversary of one of the worst natural disasters in recent memory: Hurricane Andrew.

Many of my colleagues will remember that Andrew roared ashore in the middle of the night and vented its fury on the people of South Florida. The storm severely disrupted the lives of thousands of families. It damaged 128,000 homes and left approximately 160,000 people homeless. The insurance industry estimates that Andrew cost our state nearly \$30 billion.

Perhaps even more sobering than these numbers is the knowledge that the devastation and loss of life would have been even worse had the storm struck just twenty miles to the north, in the heart of downtown Miami.

These facts demonstrate the unprecedented nature of Hurricane Andrew's destructive force.

But perhaps even more unprecedented was the tremendous generosity shown by people outside of Florida in the aftermath of Andrew's driving rains and fierce winds. Americans from every corner of our nation put their lives on hold to assist those Floridians whose lives had been turned upside down by Mother Nature. Some sent food and supplies. Others packed up cars, loaded vans, and boarded buses so that they could join relief efforts.

State disaster agencies lent personnel, expertise, and know-how to the Florida Department of Community Affairs in its clean-up efforts.

This enormous outpouring of support by Americans for people they had never met and neighborhoods they had probably never visited reaffirmed our belief in the vitality and essential goodness of the human spirit.

This August, Floridians will remember Hurricane Andrew with another natural disaster on their minds. Since May 24, a deadly combination of intense heat and prolonged drought has sparked more than 2,000 forest fires in Florida's 67 counties. Even for a state that is experienced in dealing with natural disasters, these fires have been spawned during what may be one of the worst years in Florida meteorological history.

In late January and early February—in the midst of our state's dry season—several Northern Florida counties were deluged by massive floods. Not long after, parts of Central Florida were devastated by thunderstorms and tornadoes that are more typical in the summer months.

The fire crisis is the latest example of our state's climactic reversal of fortune in 1998. Florida's hot summer temperatures are typically accompanied by afternoon thunderstorms and tropical weather. This year's heat and drought, and the lush undergrowth and foliage that sprung up in the wake of Florida's unusually wet winter, combined to fuel the fires that have put the