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Senate

(Legislative day of Friday, September 22, 2000)

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Today's prayer will be offered by our guest Chaplain, Dr. James D. Miller, First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa, OK.

We are pleased to have you with us.

PRAYER

The guest Chaplain, Dr. James D. Miller, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray together.

Almighty God, who flings galaxies into space, who plays with quarks and quasars—how stunning it is, as the prophet Isaiah puts it: that You call us each by name, and we are Yours.—43:1.

It's because of such grace, O God, that we choose to begin our work this day by commending these Senators, their families, and those who work most closely with them into Your care. And as we do, we remember especially those here today who come from home carrying personal burdens that have little to do with the pressures of public service. You know our individual needs, O God. Wrap Your arms around those who find this day difficult; surprise them with Your life-giving grace and strength.

Grant these Senators a heart for the people whom they serve, especially those Americans whose hopes are diminished today, whose dreams constricted, who wonder if there's any voice that really speaks on their behalf.

We thank You for blessings that come through those who serve with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. Grant these leaders humility in discourse, courage to follow convictions, and wisdom to be led by conscience. May they be honoring of one another, and may the work done here bring honor supremely to You, Sovereign Lord, before whom all of us will one day stand and give account.

We offer our prayers from the different faith traditions in which we live, and as a Christian I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable PAT ROBERTS, a Senator from the State of Kansas, 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROBERTS). The distinguished Senator from Oklahoma is recognized.

DR. JAMES D. MILLER, GUEST CHAPLAIN

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I was very honored to have the opening prayer given by my pastor in Tulsa, OK—a church where my wife, who is present today, and I were married 41 years ago—when he was a very small baby, I might add. It is kind of unique, Mr. President. You know Oklahoma quite well. Oklahoma wasn't even a State until 1907, and yet the First Presbyterian Church started in 1885. For the first 15 years, the congregation was made up entirely of Cree Indian. It is an unusual type of church. I might also add that in all those years—that would be what, 115 years—there have only been six pastors of the First Presbyterian Church of Tulsa. Dr. Jim Miller is the sixth pastor. So once they come, they do not want to leave.

We are honored also to have with us his wife Diana and two of his children, David and Courtney, who are in attendance with my wife.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The distinguished Senator from Nevada is recognized.

Mr. REID. I also enjoyed the prayer.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business not to extend beyond the hour of 2 p.m.

SCHEDULE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, today the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 2 p.m. Senator DURBIN will be in control of the first hour and Senator THOMAS will be in control of the second hour.

Following morning business, the Senate will begin debate on the motion to proceed to S. 2557, the National Energy Security Act. At 3:50 p.m. today, the Senate will begin closing remarks on the Water Resources Development Act of 2000, with a vote scheduled to occur at 4:50 p.m. As a reminder, cloture was filed on the pending amendment to the H-1B visa bill on Friday.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I now ask unanimous consent that the Senate convene at 9:30 a.m. tomorrow; that the time until 10:30 be equally divided between the two managers; and that the cloture vote on the pending amendment to the H-1B visa bill occur at 10:30 a.m.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection? The Chair hears none and it is so ordered.

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



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Mr. INHOFE. I thank my colleagues for their attention.

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H-1B AND LATINO AND
IMMIGRANT FAIRNESS ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, on Friday I moved that we proceed to the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, and my good friend, the majority leader, objected to our proceeding to that bill. I was disappointed, and I am sorry that we are not going to be able to debate this issue, and hope that there will come a time before this Congress ends when we will be able to do so.

Those who are watching for action on this important piece of legislation should understand why we are at this point; that is, why we are not debating the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, but, rather, why we are now on H-1B only, and why tomorrow there is going to be a motion to invoke cloture on the underlying bill.

I consider myself to be one of the strongest supporters for increasing visas for highly skilled workers. I have spent an enormous amount of time over the past several years working on this legislation in an effort to expedite its consideration. As a matter of fact, this legislation should have been brought forward to the Senate many months ago. It should have been taken up and debated under the normal process of considering legislation. I believe an H-1B bill would have passed quickly and the legislation would have already been signed into law. But it also would have provided other Members opportunities, as is their right, to offer related immigration amendments for what we all agree is the only immigration bill that we would consider this year as a freestanding bill.

Hindsight is 20-20. The majority decided not to consider this measure under the traditional rules that have served the Senate for more than 200 years. I believe, however, as I have indicated, that we will have time to debate the legislation about which I speak.

I think it is unfortunate that we at this stage are going to do the H-1B bill, apparently, alone. I say that because we were so close to an agreement on this underlying legislation. The details were set—the minority agreed each side would have 10 amendments, an hour each. That was compressed to five, then four. We agreed to do that. But we were turned down, and today we find ourselves in this parliamentary situation.

We could pass this legislation, including the amendment about which I speak, in a day—a day and a half at the most. Instead, the majority is insisting on closing off all debate and preventing the consideration of immigration amendments.

I believe that offering and voting on amendments is a right, not a privilege. H-1B was designed so trained professionals could work for a limited time in the United States. It has become

widely popular, especially in an age such as this, when Microsoft, IBM and other high-tech companies decided they needed people to fill jobs that were simply not being filled. Hundreds of start-up high-tech companies, in addition to the big ones such as Microsoft and IBM, began using this tool, H-1B, in an effort to recruit an army of high-tech workers for programming jobs. Mostly these people came from India, China, and Great Britain. We now have almost half a million people in this country who came as a result of H-1B. Individuals have filled a critical shortage of high-tech workers in this country and, in fact, the demand still exists. That is why we need to raise the cap for H-1B immigration.

But I also believe strongly that we cannot serve one of our country's very important interests and needs at the expense of others—in particular, when the stakes are people's families and their labor.

The needs of the United States are not subject to the zero sum theory. We cannot afford to deal or choose or prioritize between people and who we will serve as their legislators. We must try to serve them all. That is our cause, and that is what we promised our constituents.

This applies specifically to the other pieces of legislation that have been part of this discussion—in particular with the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act, the piece of legislation I moved to proceed on last Friday. This piece of act seeks to provide permanent and legally defined groups of immigrants who are already here, already working, and already contributing to the tax base and social fabric of our country with a way to gain U.S. citizenship.

This piece of legislation provides these people with a way to benefit from the opportunities our country affords good citizenship and hard work. While sectors of this economy have benefited from this extended period of economic growth, and with unemployment rates approaching zero in some parts of our country, employers in all sectors, skilled and semi-skilled, are finding themselves with a tremendous shortage of labor. These views are echoed in many quarters.

I would like to refer, for example, to a letter sent to me by the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, which is a group of businesses and trade associations from around the country which was formed specifically to address the shortage of workers in this country. This letter, dated September 8, is addressed to me.

I ask unanimous consent it be printed in the RECORD.

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

ESSENTIAL WORKER
IMMIGRATION COALITION,
September 8, 2000.

Hon. HARRY REID,
Minority Whip, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR REID: The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC) is a coalition of businesses, trade associations, and other organizations from across the industry spectrum concerned with the shortage of both semi-skilled and unskilled ("essential worker") labor.

While all sectors of the economy have benefited from the extended period of economic growth, one significant impediment to continued growth is the shortage of essential workers. With unemployment rates in some areas approaching zero and despite continuing vigorous and successful welfare-to-work, school-to-work, and other recruitment efforts, some businesses are now finding themselves with no applicants of any kind for numerous job openings. There simply are not enough workers in the U.S. to meet the demand of our strong economy, and we must recognize that foreign workers are part of the answer.

Furthermore, in this tight labor market, it can be devastating when a business loses employees because they are found to be in the U.S. illegally. Many of these workers have been in this country for years; paying taxes and building lives. EWIC supports measures that will allow them to remain productive members of our society.

We believe there are several steps Congress can take now to help stabilize the current workforce.

Update the registry date. As has been done in the past, the registry date should be moved forward, this time from 1972 to 1986. This would allow undocumented immigrants who have lived and worked in the U.S. for many years to remain here permanently.

Restore Section 245(i). A provision of immigration law, Section 245(i), allowed eligible people living here to pay a \$1,000 fee and adjust their status in this country. Since Section 245(i) was grandfathered in 1998, INS backlogs have skyrocketed, families have been separated, businesses have lost valuable employees, and eligible people must leave the country (often for years) in order to adjust.

Pass the Central American and Haitian Adjustment Act. Refugees from certain Central American and Caribbean countries currently are eligible to become permanent residents. However, current law does not help others in similar circumstances. Congress needs to act to ensure that refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Honduras have the same opportunity to become permanent residents.

We are also enclosing our reform agenda which includes our number one priority: allowing employers facing worker shortages greater access to the global labor market. EWIC's members employ many immigrants and support immigration reforms that unite families and help stabilize the current U.S. workforce. We look forward to working with you to pass all of these important measures.

Sincerely,
ESSENTIAL WORKER
IMMIGRATION COALITION.
MEMBERS

American Health Care Association.
American Hotel & Motel Association.
American Immigration Lawyers Association.
American Meat Institute.
American Road & Transportation Builders Association.
American Nursery & Landscape Association.