

the border, and we realize that the United States has officially evacuated American citizens from Lebanon because of the danger.

We are also very aware of the fact that we have asked other Americans who remained to remove themselves as quickly as possible. It is estimated that 20 to 25 percent of the population of Lebanon has now been displaced. They are refugees—people who have been forced to leave their homes because of the danger of remaining because of the hostilities that continue between Israel and Hezbollah.

The purpose of this legislation is not new. It is something that has been done repeatedly. It grants temporary protected status to those Lebanese visitors in the United States who are legally here on visas which permit them to be here and which may soon expire. When they do, under the law these people are expected to leave the United States and return to Lebanon.

We have in the past been sensitized to the fact that sending many of these families from the United States to war-torn countries under these circumstances may in fact endanger those families.

The United States has many, many times in the past said we will grant temporary protected status to visitors in the United States to protect them from returning to a dangerous situation.

It is an act of compassion, an act of humanitarian caring, and I think speaks well of the United States. In the past we have even granted this status to Lebanese visitors when Lebanon was at war in the 1990s for the very same reason.

Today, there are seven countries around the world where the United States has granted temporary protected status to visitors from those countries in the United States.

This temporary protected status does not put these visitors on a path to legalization or citizenship. It simply allows them if they wish to stay in the U.S. while the hostilities continue up to a year. It would be a renewal after that point.

The reason I offered it at this late hour is because it is a matter of great urgency. It is important that we do this in a timely fashion.

As we consider this measure, the Bush administration is considering whether to do this administratively, which they can. We have done it legislatively. It has been done administratively.

My concern is that tomorrow I am certain some Lebanese visitors to the U.S. will find that their visas have expired, and they will face a very difficult decision. If they comply with the law and leave, returning to Lebanon, they could be endangering families and children who are here innocently visiting members of their family and friends. We don't want that to happen. These poor people from Lebanon, these innocent victims, should not have to return to this scene.

Of course, our State Department and the Department of Homeland Security would retain the authority to review each and every person. If for any reason some Lebanese visitor to the United States should not be allowed to remain in the United States, they can be denied the status. So it is done on a case-by-case basis. It offers a protection, which I think is the humanitarian thing to do.

Throughout history there have been times when in the course of war people have turned refugees from their country, left their country and turned to other countries for refuge. In many instances, countries have welcomed them understanding that that is the right and humane thing to do. In other instances, countries have shunned them. Those countries have been embarrassed by the history that was written afterwards.

I am lucky to be a Senator in this great country, a country which has extended this generosity and this welcome time and time again.

I am urging my colleagues this evening to join me in passing this bill, an extraordinary passage by unanimous consent so that we can send a clear message to the administration and to the Lebanese visitors to the United States that we deeply care about their safety and their security.

I see the majority leader is on the floor. I will make the formal unanimous consent request.

I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 3765, the Lebanese Temporary Protected Status bill that has been introduced by myself, Senator SUNUNU, Senator FEINGOLD, and Senator STABENOW, that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration, the bill be read a third time and passed, and the motion reconsider be laid upon the table without any intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, reserving right to object, S. 3765 to permit nationals being granted temporary protected status in United States is a bill that I personally support. And the chairman of the Judiciary Committee commented to the distinguished assistant minority leader his support. I just received it 15 minutes ago. I am trying to clear it but have not heard back from everybody tonight.

Without giving everyone the opportunity to review it, I am going to have to object tonight.

Again, we will see what happens over the next 30 or 40 minutes that we are in tonight. Not having heard back from everyone, I am unable to verify. So I do object.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I understand. I gave this to the majority leader maybe 45 minutes ago at most. I certainly didn't want to try to surprise him and mislead him because I think this is a matter that is very important. I sincerely hope we can clear this tonight. If we are unable to clear this and

pass this legislation—or even if we do—I urge Michael Chertoff, Secretary of the Homeland Security Department, to grant this status to Lebanon and to do it immediately—immediately. The people of Lebanon cannot wait until Congress returns to Washington in September. And his immediate action will save lives and give peace of mind to a lot of our friends from Lebanon and to their families who live in the United States.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, during the next probably 20 or 30 minutes we will be working on a number of issues which are coming up unexpectedly at this late hour given the fact that we will be out for 4 weeks. It is a little bit disjointed as we pull together a number of these unanimous consent requests. And then we have the issue of nominations and a few more remarks.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 3769

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Foreign Relations be discharged from further consideration of S. 3769 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, and that any statements relating to the measure be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I am not familiar with this bill. I have been informed by our cloakroom that there are objections to this from Members who are familiar with the content of the bill and/or members of the Foreign Relations Committee. I hope those as well can be resolved this evening. Absent that happening, I will have to object to this unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I am disappointed that tonight we could not pass this bill. This is the Cuba Transition Act of 2006 which I cosponsored along with the Senators ENSIGN and MARTINEZ.

This bill would have authorized assistance to the people of Cuba, encouraged a democratic election process, and created a fund to support independent civil-society-building efforts.

It would have created the Fund For a Free Cuba which would have provided assistance to a transitional government in Cuba, and included assistance