

will play an important role in guiding us toward real solutions.

Senator PAUL is a lawmaker to watch. He brings a keen intellect and rare passion to the job. He will be an important voice in this body in the many debates to come.

I look forward to working with him on behalf of Kentuckians and all Americans.

Mr. DEMINT. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

FAA AIR TRANSPORTATION MODERNIZATION AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENT ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 223, which the clerk will report by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 223) to modernize the air traffic control system, improve the safety, reliability, and availability of transportation by air in the United States, provide for modernization of the air traffic control system, reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Stabenow amendment No. 9, to repeal the expansion of information reporting requirements for payments of \$600 or more to corporations.

McConnell amendment No. 13, to repeal the job-killing health care law and health care-related provisions in the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010.

Mr. ROCKEFELLER. Madam President, this is, in fact, the aviation bill. As everybody knows, that is what we are doing; we are doing the aviation bill. We are talking about health care, but secretly we are doing the aviation bill. So I thought it would be interesting to talk about the aviation bill, to sort of bring people's minds back to that very important subject. It is interesting, because we want transparency, no filling up of the tree, everybody could offer all of the amendments they want. We immediately got amendments to repeal health care and other kinds of things but nothing about aviation. So as manager of that bill, I am going to talk about aviation. I do not guarantee it will be a scintillating speech, but it is going to be about aviation, because that is the bill we are on.

I rise to speak about—which I did a little bit yesterday—the modernization

of the Nation's air traffic control system. It is kind of important to New York and New Jersey.

I cannot emphasize enough to all of my colleagues the importance of this issue to the United States. It is an issue I care deeply about, one Senator HUTCHISON cares deeply about, one I am completely committed to getting done. We have to. It is a *sine qua non*. It will make air traffic safer, more efficient, provide numerous economic and environmental benefits.

I touched on air traffic modernization in my opening statement yesterday. But I want to spend a short time, knowing that my colleague Senator HUTCHISON is here and wants to talk, on the air traffic modernization. It just has to be discussed in a tiny bit greater detail so people understand how important it is.

There will be some technical stuff in here, and I apologize for that, but people have to understand this. I know this subject is very technical. It is very confusing. It has lots of acronyms, unmemorable acronyms, but the technology will change aviation in truly amazing ways, and it is of overwhelming importance to the country.

Every time I get in my car, I find it implausible that so many automobiles navigate using more sophisticated global positioning systems than aircraft. Well, that is amusing, except it is horrifying, actually. It is horrifying. We can do it in Detroit with automobiles that sell for \$15,000, \$25,000, but we cannot do it on a multimillion-dollar aircraft because we have not decided to do it aggressively in our legislation. So we have to upgrade our system now or we are going to face absolutely enormous consequences.

I continue to believe that the modernization of our Nation's antiquated air traffic control system has to be one of the Nation's highest priorities. We have fallen behind, as is now—it is actually kind of interesting. It has become a mantra: We have fallen behind Mongolia. People like to talk about that. I am the original author of that startling fact—this tiny little nation ahead of us. But it does not make any difference. Everybody should steal the line because it makes the point: They have it. They are building it from scratch. We do not. So if we recognize the benefits of using the most advanced technology and if they do, perhaps it is something we might think about.

The United States, of course, has a much larger and more complex airspace system than Mongolia or any other country in the world, but this is precisely the problem: that we are so big and we are so complicated; there are 36,000 flights in a day. There are airplanes during the day, all day long, all over the country, at different altitudes, coming in, avoiding weather, avoiding each other, facing delays or not. Our aviation system actually moves 30,000 flights a day—I would say 36,000, but it says 30,000—and nearly 800 million people per year—a lot tougher

than Mongolia. But we face gridlock if we do not make significant progress on modernization and make it very soon. The FAA's most recent forecasts estimate demand for air travel will be about 1 billion people within the next decade. That is a 40-percent increase. That is horrific.

Senator ISAKSON has just come on the floor. His airport in Atlanta is one of the most complicated and busy in the entire world. He needs, as do we all, an air traffic control system which is digitalized, which makes communication between air traffic controllers and pilots much more accurate so they can see terrain, they can see mountains, they can see weather, all in streamingly live exactitude.

The economic downturn of the past several years has actually, in a quirky way, bought us some time to reform our system. We have declined to use it, but this will quickly change as the economy rebounds. Our present air traffic control system is stretched to its limits already. Anyone who flies on a regular basis has experienced the system's congestion and delay problems. We talked about that yesterday. We will talk more. This system will not meet the projected growth of the next decade.

So we have this choice. An industry that employs 11 million people and several more in indirect jobs, that traffics 800 million people around the country to all kinds of places large and small, very complicated—runway problems, gateway problems, all kinds of problems—if we do not have this up to speed, we are a nation in trouble and people will start dying.

The Next Generation Air Transportation System, NextGen, will create significantly more capacity by allowing aircraft to move more efficiently and take more direct routes. I talked about that yesterday. It is so important. Planes now, because of the sort of radar ground-based system, wind their way to their destination, avoiding planes, avoiding weather, and how quickly can they see it, how accurately can they see it, are they aware of the altitude of other planes above them and below them? Probably not very accurate. So they don't take direct routes. So these improvements, if they do take direct routes, will save our economy billions annually.

The technology will also allow the FAA to safely allow the closer spacing of aircraft. More aircraft can land and do so more safely because of the reality of the digitalization of everything is so clear to the pilot and to the air traffic controller. They are in sync for the first time with a highly sophisticated system. And the Northeast corridor probably will be the greatest beneficiary of all of that. It will be.

Greater operational efficiency will also create substantial environmental benefits. Drastic reductions in fuel consumption—taking more of a straight line from one place to another rather than going all over the place—saves a