

We will move forward to confirm Crystal Nix-Hines to be U.S. Permanent Representative for UNESCO; Michael J. McCord to be Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller; R. Jane Chu, Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts for a term of 4 years; and then we will move forward on Todd A. Batta to be Assistant Secretary of Agriculture.

At 1:45 p.m. this afternoon there will be three rollcall votes on the confirmation of three Federal Reserve nominations: Lael Brainard to be a member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System; Jerome H. Powell to be a member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System; and Stanley Fischer to be Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time being equally divided or controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes and the majority controlling the next 30 minutes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I ask unanimous consent that the time be charged equally.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Yesterday the Senate passed bipartisan legislation to address the VA scandal. The Sanders-McCain bill will increase patient choice, it will infuse some much needed accountability into the VA system, and it was important for us to show some urgency in addressing the crisis. That is why I voted for it, and that is why I am glad that the majority leader decided to move forward on this effort, even if it took a vote to set aside a par-

tisan bill in order to take up this important bipartisan legislation.

It will now go to conference so it can be improved further. The sooner the bill managers begin negotiations with their colleagues in the House, the sooner we can get a bill on the President's desk. I am optimistic they will do just that.

As I have said all week, the systemic failures and scandals we have seen within the administration are a national disgrace. When you see 100,000 veterans—100,000 of them—waiting for care, that is a national disgrace. When you see so many veterans waiting 3 months or longer just to get an appointment, that is a national disgrace. And when you see veterans dying before they even receive care they were counting on, it is completely unacceptable.

So this problem needs to be solved, and there is more to be done. A lot of the responsibility here resides with the President himself. He still needs to nominate a capable manager who possesses the necessary skills, leadership, and determination to fix this scandal. He needs to support the thousands of VA workers committed to serving our veterans and to provide all those who serve bravely with the timely care they deserve, and he needs to use all the tools in his toolbox to address the systemic management failures—both the tools he already has and the new ones we can provide him, such as those contained within the legislation we passed yesterday. Our veterans have waited long enough for care, and they shouldn't be made to wait any longer.

90TH BIRTHDAY OF PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH

Mr. McCONNELL. Obviously much of Washington's focus this week has been on doing right by our veterans. That is exactly what we should be doing. We owe so much to the men and women who protect us. In that spirit I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge an important milestone just reached by one of America's most famous veterans.

Today our Nation's 41st President, George H.W. Bush, turns 90. It is a rare milestone. Only 4 other presidents have ever reached it: Herbert Hoover, John Adams, Gerald Ford, and the man President Bush once served under, Ronald Reagan.

Beyond wishing him a very happy birthday, I want to acknowledge President Bush's extraordinary record of service. On his 18th birthday the future President volunteered as a World War II Navy pilot, going on to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery. From there he would go on to excel in a dizzying number of fields as a businessman, a Congressman, a diplomat, CIA Director, leader of his party, Vice President and President, and Commander in Chief during Desert Storm and Desert Shield.

Even his post-Presidency has been marked by continuing and gracious

willingness to serve. Yet for all of his professional distinction, I know President Bush's favorite job never appeared on his resume. It was his role as proud husband to Barbara, who also turned a year older this week, and as the father of five adoring children and proud grandfather and great-grandfather. Maybe that is why every time you see him these days he always has a big smile on his face and a lively pair of socks on his feet. With a loving family like that, it is not hard to see why.

So I am proud to cosponsor the resolution we agreed to yesterday honoring this good man and former President for such a long lifetime of service. I know my colleagues join me in sending President Bush the warmest of birthday wishes.

TRIBUTE TO MARTHA J. CASSITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, one final note concerning our Nation's veterans. I want to honor an exemplary citizen of my home State, the Commonwealth of Kentucky, who has devoted her life to service of our country. Martha J. Cassity is a veteran of the U.S. Army, a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and this Saturday she will be named the first female veteran State commander of the Kentucky VFW. Her ascension to this post is an accomplishment I believe is deserving of recognition and praise here in the Senate.

Martha was born on September 29, 1957, in my hometown of Louisville. She was raised there by her parents Joan and Charles Blanford. While attending Western High School, Martha joined the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1974, thus beginning her life of devoted service to her country.

The stated mission of the Ladies Auxiliary is to serve "the veterans of this country and our communities in honor of the sacrifices and commitment of every man and woman who has served in uniform." For 9 years Martha worked tirelessly to advance this mission, holding multiple chairmanships in the organization.

Martha joined the U.S. Army in October of 1984 as a track vehicle repairer and gave 10 years of honorable service to the Army, including postings in Germany and South Korea. She became eligible to join the VFW while stationed in South Korea, and she did so in 1991.

Upon returning from South Korea, Martha was stationed at Fort Stewart, GA, where she was injured during the battalion's preparations for Operation Desert Storm. She was honorably discharged in 1994. After leaving the Army, Martha earned her associate's degree in applied science from Alabama Southern Community College. Although her days in the military were behind her, Martha's service to America and her fellow veterans would continue. Since 1999 Martha has been heavily involved in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. She has held numerous chairmanships and chairs on the post and

district levels. She has served as VFW post and district commander. She has held chairmanships on the national level and has been on the National Women Veterans Committee for the past 3 years. She currently serves as senior vice commander of the Kentucky VFW, and this Saturday she will be named the first female veteran State commander of the Kentucky VFW.

We owe our veterans an unimaginable debt for their service to our country. In this new post Martha will continue to serve her Nation by advocating on veterans' behalf. Martha works to make real the VFW's vision: ensuring that veterans are respected for their service and recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of a grateful America.

So today I ask that my Senate colleagues join me in recognizing Martha J. Cassity's lifetime of service to our country and wishing her well in her new post as veteran State commander of the Kentucky VFW. She is a true friend to Kentucky veterans, to the Commonwealth, and to our country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

HONORING TWO GREAT MEN

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to join our Republican leader in recognizing the birthday of the 41st President of the United States, George H.W. Bush. It is possible that nobody ever came to the Presidency with a preparation that exceeded his in both diplomacy—he served as the first U.S. emissary to China in those decades and he served as the head of the CIA. He served as Vice President.

I was just reading a few days ago another and new retelling of what happened as the Soviet bloc fell apart—the importance of both President Reagan and President Bush, who brought his unique background to that time when it was so unpredictable what might happen. Frankly, the results turned out to be carefully managed by this President as the Berlin Wall fell, as these countries came together, and President Bush's skills were in great evidence, as they were when the coalition was put together to push back what the Iraqis had done in Kuwait.

But probably his greatest example to all of us is an example of a man of kindness and generosity—some would say an almost too forgiving nature to have risen in politics as he did. But on his 90th birthday it is a good time for Americans to reflect about his service to the country. His wife's birthday was just a few days ago, and on her birthday we also want to think about their family and what their family has meant to the country.

My understanding is that President Bush has announced that he intends to jump out of an airplane for the third decade in a row as he did on his 70th birthday and 80th birthday, and will do

on this 90th birthday. I am not sure the judgment to do that is quite as good as the judgment he showed in managing the future of the country. But if you are 90, you only get to be 90 once, and I am sure he is the only 90-year-old President to have jumped out of an airplane in 3 different decades. We appreciate the service of George H.W. Bush to his country, from signing up to be the youngest pilot in World War II until the service that he continues to provide as a former President of the United States.

I was thinking about him and the other World War II veterans as we see them leave us as heads of families, as examples we could turn to, and of the thought of another veteran whom one of my colleagues was mentioning just a few days ago, Senator MORAN's father Raymond Moran.

Raymond Moran died on D-day at 98 years old. Senator MORAN and I have been good friends for a long time. I know we speak on this floor in the Senate about "my good friend, our long time relationship." This is a case where we really have been close friends. We have been so close that in the couple of decades now that we have known each other, I have heard a lot about JERRY MORAN's father and his mother.

JERRY was lucky enough to have both of his parents until just a couple of years ago, and his mom and dad were together until just a couple of years ago. JERRY's father was a staff sergeant in North Africa and in Italy. He was not part of the D-day invasion, even though his death on June 6, the 70th Anniversary of D-day, is a significant day for all the veterans of that conflict.

The stories I heard about Senator MORAN's father were the stories that you would think a man from Plainville, KS, would be part of—quiet, unassuming, church-going, passing along the values that he stood for to his family, and working hard and believing in some way that somehow his children could do anything they wanted to do. Then he had the opportunity to see his son in the Congress of the United States representing that huge district in western Kansas and then in the Senate of the United States.

These two stories are very different—the stories of George H.W. Bush and Raymond Moran. But the lives that these two men led are very similar in the values that they stood for and the values of their generation—the generation that Tom Brokaw called "the greatest generation." These are fundamental and foundational values to what we are all about as a nation.

HEALTH CARE

This week the Senate stepped up united as we seldom are these days to talk about the veterans of that war and our other wars and the obligation that we have to our veterans. The bill that the Senate passed yesterday, which I

cosponsored and I voted for, can be better and, frankly, it will be better after we get a chance to have a conference with our House colleagues—maybe a conference similar to the conferences we used to hold. It is time we get back to the normal way of doing business.

But the underlying approach and key significant change this bill the Senate passed yesterday brings to the veterans is more options and more opportunities. Particularly our younger veterans want to see more choices. They want to have more information.

When Senator STABENOW and I sponsored and initially put the bill forward in early 2013, the Excellence in Mental Health Act, the Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were among our greatest supporters along with law enforcement and the mental health community. This was for an act they thought had the potential to provide more options for treatment, more places to go, more ways to get the mental health treatment and access you would like to have that worked with family, that worked with jobs. These are young veterans who left the military but still have lots of obligations that they want to, need to, and should be trying to fulfill for themselves, their families, and the work they have chosen to do, so the assistance we can give them with more options is important.

This bill will give veterans more options. If the Veterans' Administration fails to meet their needs in an appropriate way or if a veteran is 40 miles or an hour away—or any way you measure traffic and time—from a veterans facility, that veteran will have the ability to permanently get the care they need at any facility that accepts Medicare patients at the Medicare rate, and that would be the reimbursement rate the government and the VA will be obligated to pay.

Even if a veteran lives next door to a VA hospital, if that hospital could not see that veteran within the time the law will ultimately decide is the critical time—by the way, there are occasions when the critical time is right away. For a veteran suffering from a heart attack or contemplating suicide, there is no waiting period for them. If a veteran can't be seen within 14 days for routine medical care, that veteran will get a card that says they can go wherever they want to go.

I hope that is the way this final bill works out so veterans will have lots of options. I think the Veterans' Administration is going to be better if they have to compete. I have thought that for a long time.

I was at the Truman veterans facility—I stand here at one of the desks Harry Truman used when he was in the Senate. His name is carved in the desk drawer. Anyway, I was at the Truman veterans facility in Columbia, MO, with my longtime good friend Dewey Rehms, who advises me on veterans issues with the VFW, and we were meeting with the people who run that hospital. Dewey Rehms said: As Senator BLUNT has been saying for at least