Second, a close review of the report revealed that for noncontroversial nominees who were confirmed, there was little if any difference between the timing of confirmation for minority nominees and nonminority nominees in 1997 and 1998. Only when the President appointed a controversial female or minority nominee who was not confirmed did a disparity arise. Third, in 1991 and 1992, when George Bush was President, the Democratically controlled Senate confirmed female and minority nominees at a far slower pace than white male nominees. Fourth, this year, over 50% of the nominees that the Judiciary Committee reported to the full Senate have been women and minorities. Finally, even the Democratic former chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator JOE BIDEN, stated publicly that the process by which the committee, under my chairmanship, examines and approve judicial nominees ''has not a single thing to do with gender or race.''

As chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I take the constitutional duties of advice and consent and the responsibility for maintaining the institutional dignity of the Senate very seriously. Although the President has occasionally nominated controversial candidates, under my tenure as chairman, not one nominee has suffered a public attack on his, or her, character by this committee. Not one nominee has had his, or her, confidential background information leaked to the public by a member of this committee. And not one nominee has been examined for anything other than his, or her, integrity, competence, temperament, and respect for the rule of law.

The Senate has conducted the confirmations process in a fair and principled manner, and the process has worked well. As the first session of the 106th Congress comes to an end, the federal Judiciary is once again sufficiently staffed to perform its function under Article III of the Constitution. Senator LOTT, and the Senate as a whole, are to be commended.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now return to legislative session.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. LOTT. Mr. President, as in executive session, I ask unanimous consent that all nominations received by the Senate during the 106th Congress, first session, remain in status quo, notwithstanding the November 19, 1999 adjournment of the Senate, and the provisions of rule XXXI, paragraph 6 of the standing rules of the Senate.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

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

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

SHARED APPRECIATION AGREEMENTS

Mr. BURNS. Mr. President, shared appreciation agreements have the potential to cause hundreds of farm foreclosures across the nation, and especially in my home state of Montana. Ten years ago, a large number of farmers signed these agreements. At that time they were under the impression that they would be required to pay these back at the end of ten years, at a reasonable rate of redemption.

However, that has not proved to be the case. The appraisals being conducted by the Farm Service Agency are showing increased values of ridiculous proportions. By all standards, one would expect the value to have decreased. Farm prices are the lowest they have been in years, and there does not seem to be a quick recovery forthcoming. Farmers cannot possibly be expected to pay back a value twice the amount they originally wrote down. Especially in light of the current market situation, I believe something must be done about the way these appraisals are conducted.

USDA is attempting to fix the problem with proposed rules and regulations but farmers need help with these agreements now. The USDA has published several regulations addressing the issue but the comment period will further drag out the process. I am fearful that in the meantime more farmers will be forced into foreclosure.

My bill mandates by legislation these important regulations. It will exclude capital investments from the increase in appreciation and allow farmers to take out a loan at the ''Homestead Rate,'' which is the government's cost of borrowing.

Farmers should not be penalized for attempting to better their operations. Nor can they be expected to delay capital improvements so that they will not be penalized. It will be necessary for most of these agricultural producers to take out an additional loan during these hard times. It is important that the interest rate on that loan will accommodate their needs. The governments current cost of borrowing equals about 6.25 percent, far less than the original 9 percent farmers and ranches were paying.

I look forward to working with members in other states to alleviate the financial burdens imposed by shared appreciation agreements. I hope that we may move this through the legislative process quickly to provide help as soon as possible to our farmers.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY RESEARCH LABORATORIES ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, biomedical research is making great strides in providing new treatments for a wide range of diseases. Thousands of talented scientists across the country are making new discoveries about the fundamental mechanisms of health and disease. Yet the talents of these researchers are often undermined by a lack of adequate facilities and equipment to conduct their crucial work.

Numerous authoritative studies have demonstrated that medical research laboratories are critically in need of reconstruction and repair. The National Science Foundation found that over half the institutions conducting biomedical research in this country suffer from inadequate space for medical research. The Foundation also reported that medical research institutions have had to postpone nearly $11 billion in renovation and construction projects due to lack of adequate funding. As a result, over a quarter of medical research facilities in the nation are in urgent need of renovation or reconstruction.

The need to revitalize the infrastructure of our research enterprise is recognized throughout the medical community. The Association of American Medical Colleges and the Federation of Societies for Experimental Biology have both issued statements calling on the federal government to provide increased resources for reconstruction and renovation of medical research facilities.

The bill before the Senate today significantly increases our commitment by authorizing a substantial increase in the funds available to the National Institute of Health to provide peer-reviewed grants for laboratory construction and renovation.

Not only have medical research facilities fallen into disrepair, but laboratories frequently lack needed research equipment. Modern medical instruments are increasingly sophisticated. Scientists are gaining new insights into such basic processes as the workings of the brain and the genetic basis of disease. With this increase in sophistication has come an increase in cost. The rising price of medical technology means that scientists must often curtail research programs, because they lack access to sensitive instruments such as MRI scanners or high resolution microscopes.

To address the acute need for sophisticated scientific instruments, the bill before us also provides needed funds for medical researchers to purchase major pieces of scientific equipment. Only by giving medical researchers the equipment they need to use their talents