

SENATE—Wednesday, January 26, 2005

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal King, our refuge and strength, we lift our hearts in gratitude for the gift of this new day. We trust You to order our steps and direct us on the right road. Lord, show us where to walk and lead us with Your truth, for we are kept by Your unfailing love and compassion. For the honor of Your name, forgive our sins, for You alone can rescue us.

Bless our Senators today in their work. May integrity and honesty protect them. Keep them safe as they do the work of freedom. Give them the wisdom to take their burdens to You, knowing You will strengthen them for the journey. Keep them from slipping or falling.

In a special way, comfort the families of the Marines who died recently in the helicopter crash. Place Your shield of protection around our military.

We pray in Your powerful name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this morning, following our leader remarks, we will have an abbreviated period for morning business until 10:30 a.m. At 10:30, we will begin the final hour of debate on the nomination of Condoleezza Rice to be Secretary of State. Therefore, the vote on that nomination will occur at 11:30 this morning.

Following that vote, the Senate will consider the nomination of Jim Nichol-

son to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. That will take 30 minutes or less, as provided by the order, and we do not anticipate a rollcall vote on that nomination.

Following that nomination, the Senate will consider the nomination of Michael Leavitt to be Secretary of Health and Human Services. The order from last night allows for up to 2 hours of debate. Again, I am not sure, but I do not think all of that debate time will be necessary. In any event, we do not have a request for a rollcall vote in relation to the Leavitt nomination as well.

Other nominations are expected to be reported today, including the Bodman nomination to be Secretary of Energy. We will try, of course, to expedite the consideration of this Cabinet-level appointment for today as well.

Again, as a reminder, the first rollcall vote will occur at 11:30 a.m. today.

IRAQ ELECTIONS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I have a few remarks to make on the Iraq elections. I will proceed in sharing a few experiences that I had recently, but really focus on what will occur on Sunday, January 30, and that is that millions of Iraqis will, for the first time in decades, vote in free elections.

I truthfully believe we will see the power of elections speak loudly this Sunday. It is going to be with a lot of courage and a lot of determination that those who vote will travel to over 5,000 polling stations across the country. They will be casting their ballot for 275 national assembly positions that will, in turn, draft a new constitution.

It is a historic event for the people of Iraq. It is, in the words of historian Fouad Ajami, "a breakthrough in the terrible history of this tormented land."

Doomsayers and pessimists point to the terrorist attacks on the Iraqi citizenry as proof that Iraqis are not ready for self-governance. They say: Postpone the elections. They say: Iraqis have no history of liberty. In other words, withhold freedom from the innocent and hand victory to the guilty. Blame the victim, reward the criminal. It is a cruel logic and one that, thankfully, the Iraqis have flat out rejected.

Indeed, numerous candidates all over the country have entered the elections despite the insurgents' and the terrorists' threats and attempts at intimidation. Iraqi voter turnout on Sunday will be higher than in many Western democracies.

Listen to the words of Iraqis themselves. Baghdad resident Ali Danif tells an American paper:

Going to the polling stations is a victory for the Iraqi people.

Says his friend Kadhim Hassan:

Without elections, there will be tyranny. It's time for us to come into the light.

On January 30, Iraqis will take those first momentous steps. No one presumes the elections will be perfect, including the Iraqi people themselves. The terrorists will continue their attempts to derail the process between now and then. Unfortunately, the attacks, I believe, are likely to increase during this period and quite possibly for some time afterward. But the American people will stand with the Iraqi people for democracy and for freedom.

I was in Iraq 2 weeks ago with a Senate delegation, and based on our experiences in talking with the Iraqi people, in talking with the leadership, and attending a town meeting, I can say with confidence that despite the insurgents' bombs and threats, democracy is on the way.

During our time in Iraq, my Senate colleagues and I were in a meeting with Prime Minister Allawi. In the middle of that meeting, he asked if we would be willing to go around the block or a few hundred yards away at a townhall meeting that he was conducting. We said yes. It was spontaneous, and we did not know what to expect.

We went with him in the middle of our meeting, and it was a meeting he had been holding over the course of the day. We walked into a room about the size of this Chamber, and it was packed. It was packed with more than 150 Sunni sheiks who were from the Sunni triangle area, the area where most of the terrorist activity has been occurring.

We walked into the room, and it was embroiled in activity. It was embroiled in debate. People were scrambling. Sheiks were scrambling for the microphone so they could express themselves. There was controversy, disagreement. It was orderly in the sense that one person talked at a time. This was really democracy at its best. It was spontaneous, not planned by us. The Prime Minister, in meeting with the sheiks, spent most of the day listening very patiently.

The presentations were passionate, and for me it captured the real contrast on that day when we saw free speech and full expression. Some were saying postpone the elections; others we saying, no, don't postpone the elections. This is the first step toward democracy. Others said America has done