

as a check against sorely deficient presidential choices. It is not a license to exercise partisan influence over these vital jobs by blocking confirmation of entire slates of well-qualified nominees offered by a president of the opposite party.

Nevertheless, at a time when an uncommonly high number of judicial vacancies is threatening the sound functioning of the nation's courts, Senate Republicans are persisting in playing an obstructionist game. (These, by the way, are the same Senate Republicans who threatened to ban filibusters if they did not get an up-or-down vote on every one of President George W. Bush's nominees, including some highly problematic ones.)

Because of Republican delaying tactics, qualified Obama nominees who have been reported out of the Judiciary Committee have been consigned to spend needless weeks and months in limbo, waiting for a vote from the full Senate.

Senate Republicans seek to pin blame for the abysmal pace of filling judicial vacancies on President Obama's slowness in making nominations. And, no question, Mr. Obama's laggard performance in this sphere is a contributing factor. Currently, there are 50 circuit and district court vacancies for which Obama has made no nomination. But that hardly explains away the Republicans' pattern of delay over the past two years on existing nominees, or the fact that Senate Republicans have consented to a vote on only a single judicial nomination since Congress returned from its August recess.

At this point, the Senate has approved 41—barely half—of President Obama's federal and district court nominees reported by the Judiciary Committee. Compare that with the first two years of the George W. Bush administration when the Senate approved all 100 of the judicial nominations approved by the committee. The final days of the lame-duck session are a chance to significantly improve on this dismal record and to lift the judicial confirmation process out of the partisan muck.

Of the 38 well-qualified judicial nominees awaiting action by the full Senate, nearly all cleared the Judiciary Committee either unanimously or with just one or two dissenting votes. Some nominees have been waiting for Senate action for nearly a year. Senator Mitch McConnell, the minority leader, should allow confirmation of all 34 nominees considered noncontroversial, including the 15 nominees cleared by the committee since the November election.

There are four other nominees who were approved by the committee over party-line Republican opposition. They, too, deserve a prompt vote rather than requiring President Obama to start the process over again by re-nominating them when the next Congress begins. That short list of controversial nominees includes Goodwin Liu, an exceptionally well-qualified law professor and legal scholar who would be the only Asian-American serving as an active judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. His potential to fill a future Supreme Court vacancy seems to be the main thing fueling Republican opposition to his nomination.

Mr. McConnell is said to be negotiating a deal with Senator Harry Reid, the majority leader, that allows for confirmation of 19 nominees approved by the committee before the election but denies consideration by the full Senate to the others. That would be a disservice to the judicial system, to Mr. Obama's nominees and to the idea that bipartisanship should exist, at last, in the advice-and-consent process for federal judges.

NATIONAL HOME CARE AND HOSPICE MONTH

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, November is National Home Care and Hospice Month, which gives us the opportunity to honor the home health and hospice caregivers and volunteers who make such a remarkable difference in the lives of their patients and their families. The highly skilled and compassionate care that home health and hospice agencies provide has helped to keep families together and enabled millions of our most frail and vulnerable individuals to avoid hospitals and nursing homes and stay just where they want to be in the comfort and security of their own homes.

Home health and hospice have consistently proven to be compassionate and cost-effective alternatives to institutional care. In fact, a recent survey conducted for the Maine chapter of AARP found that 9 out of 10 Mainers would prefer to receive services at home as opposed to a nursing home or other residential care facility. Moreover, by helping patients to avoid more costly hospitals and nursing homes, home health and hospice save Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurers millions of dollars each year.

Over the past several years, I have had the opportunity to meet and visit with a number of home health and hospice patients and providers around my State. I have seen firsthand what a difference the highly skilled and compassionate care that these health professionals provide makes to the lives of their patients and families. That is why I am such a committed and passionate advocate for home health and hospice care. I therefore urge all of my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to these wonderful health care professionals and volunteers during the month of November as we celebrate National Home Health and Hospice Month.

TRIBUTE TO MELISSA SHUTE

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise today to bid farewell to a trusted member of my staff who will be departing the Senate. Melissa Shute has served as my legislative counsel, handling issues involving energy, natural resources, and public lands. I have been fortunate to have a wonderful tradition of outstanding staffers to handle my energy and environmental issues; however, the problem with good staff is that they often get pulled away.

Melissa is no exception. She came to me in 2008 after serving as lead counsel to one of our former Members whom I highly regard, Senator Pete Dominici, on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. While on the committee, Melissa was a key player on legislation to increase domestic energy production in the United States. Melissa has developed an expertise in

energy and environmental issues and the importance they play in our economy. She is an enthusiastic warrior for the principles we share.

Melissa has provided critical counsel to me regarding major issues in nuclear, coal, and renewable fuel research and development. She also took a leading role in helping Alabamians living on the gulf coast during the tragic oil spill. Melissa and my energy team went above and beyond to take the steps necessary to help those impacted by the environmental disaster receive the support and information they need to begin the road of clean-up and recovery.

A graduate of the University of Tulsa's College of Law, Melissa has demonstrated a sound legal mind in analyzing legislative proposals that would impact current moratoria on off-shore drilling. She understands that we need to decrease our dependence on foreign oil and find new ways to tap the rich energy supplies our country has to offer.

She has been a great partner as we have worked to reduce the huge wealth transfer from the United States to purchase foreign oil, to reduce pollution, to produce energy at the lowest possible prices, such as nuclear power, and to create jobs in America. It has been a good run.

Mr. President, I express my deepest gratitude to Melissa for all of her efforts and leadership, and I wish her well as she moves on to a new chapter in her life.

TRIBUTE TO STEPHEN BOYD

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I rise today to say goodbye to one of the most esteemed members of my staff. Stephen Boyd, an exceptional individual with a deep devotion to the State of Alabama, will be leaving my office to become chief of staff for a new member of the Alabama delegation, Congressman-elect Martha Roby.

Stephen came to my office 7 years ago right out of law school. I was immediately impressed not only by his talent but by his tenacity. No matter how difficult the task given him he would pursue it with vigor, and he would not relent until he arrived at a solution. Stephen sees every obstacle as a challenge to overcome.

In his first post as my legislative assistant for energy issues, he worked on efforts to establish the Coastal Impact Assistance Program. That program became law through the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Stephen also played a significant role in developing the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act, which President George W. Bush signed into law in 2006.

Early on, Stephen also recognized the need to pursue alternative energy sources in order to diminish our dependence on foreign oil. Through his efforts he brought considerable attention

to switchgrass as a renewable energy resource, ultimately leading to switchgrass' potential being recognized in President Bush's 2006 State of the Union Address.

One of Stephen's most valuable assets is his ability to anticipate problems and to prepare for the unpredictable. Stephen was the point person for our office response when Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005. But before that disastrous hurricane hit, Stephen had already implemented an office action plan to make sure we could quickly and efficiently respond to an emergency.

In the last 4 years, Stephen has served first as my press secretary, followed by a swift promotion to communications director. He played a key role in overseeing office communications during some of the most difficult and challenging issues our country has faced in a long time—from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, to the recent economic crisis, to the disastrous oilspill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Stephen also made an invaluable contribution in two Supreme Court confirmations, helping deliver a crucial message about preserving the integrity of America's courts—defending them from the corruption of politics and grounding them in the firm bedrock of our Constitution.

Given his myriad accomplishments and his stellar service to this office, it is no surprise that Stephen is highly regarded by his colleagues in the Senate. Allow me to share what others have said:

Don Stewart, communications director for Senate minority leader MITCH MCCONNELL, said, "Stephen has shown the kind of calm leadership that was needed in one of the most active periods I've ever seen in my time here. He doesn't yell and scream, he just gets it done."

Josh Holmes, staff director for Senate minority leader MITCH MCCONNELL's Republican Communications Center, said, "Stephen is one of the rare commodities in Washington who prefers achieving results over personal accolades. He's a consummate professional and effective advocate who has been an absolute pleasure to work with."

Rick Dearborn, my chief of staff, said, "I am proud to have worked alongside Stephen Boyd. I have always admired his attention to detail and the great clarity of his perspective. He has a commonsense approach I've witnessed him apply to all manner of complex problems to be solved, issues to be decided or given further thought.

So much of what I believe has guided him to excel has been his basic honesty, his strong core integrity and a sincere commitment to serve the people of Alabama on behalf of Senator SESSIONS through his various roles in our office.

Our loss in the Senate is Martha Roby's gain in the House and the second District of Alabama. He now assumes a key position within our staff delegation, as the Congresswoman's new chief of staff. She could not have made a better choice."

Matt Miner, staff director for the Senate Judiciary Committee, said, "Stephen Boyd has been a tremendous asset to the Judiciary Committee during Senator SESSIONS' tenure as ranking member. Through two Supreme Court confirmations and numerous national security debates, Stephen's calm and thoughtful work as communications director helped focus the national debate and convey the Republican message. He is one of the most talented people with whom I have worked on Capitol Hill, and I wish him all the best in his next endeavor."

Brian Benczkowski, former staff director for the Senate Judiciary Committee said, "It was a professional and personal pleasure to work with someone as gifted and hard-working as Stephen Boyd. Stephen has an uncanny ability to analyze any given subject like a top-notch lawyer, while also applying a good dose of Alabama common sense to the problem, and then communicating the result in clear and unmistakable terms. These skills were an invaluable resource for the Senate Judiciary Committee during my tenure, particularly during the Sotomayor and Kagan nominations. If there is a silver lining in his departure from Senator SESSIONS' staff, it is that he will continue his public service for the people of Alabama. His keen judgment and excellent personal integrity will be an asset to Congresswoman Roby, and I know he will be missed by his colleagues in the Senate."

Alan Hanson, chief of staff to Senator RICHARD SHELBY, said, "It is a credit to Stephen's abilities and work ethic that he has so rapidly advanced in his Capitol Hill career. Having worked with him for 3½ years and known him much longer, I can personally attest that he is a singularly talented and capable jack-of-all-trades. Senator SESSIONS' loss is truly Congresswoman Roby's gain, and I look forward to witnessing the great things STEPHEN will accomplish in his new role in the House of Representatives."

Sarah Haley, press secretary for Senator SESSIONS, said, "Stephen Boyd is a man of scrupulous character, sound ethics, and servant leadership. It has been a privilege to work under him. Stephen will be greatly missed by all of us."

Stephen Miller, press secretary for the Senate Judiciary Committee, said, "Stephen Boyd is a brilliant communicator, operating at a truly elite level. And yet he is the furthest thing from an elitist. Thoughtful, genuine, sincere—these are the traits so familiar to those who know him. I am proud to

have had the chance to work with Stephen Boyd. But I am prouder still to call him a friend."

Ryan Patmintra, press secretary for Senator JON KYL, said, "Stephen's background in both policy and communications made him one of the top-notch Senate communicators on either side of the aisle. His ability to go beyond talking points and walk reporters through our arguments served us well. We were lucky to have him on our team. His presence and expertise will be sorely missed in the Senate."

Cindy Hayden, who served with Stephen Boyd during her tenure as my chief counsel, said, "Stephen displays unwavering devotion to Senator SESSIONS, to the people of Alabama, and to his principles. A talented lawyer and a trusted colleague, Stephen possesses a likeability even his opponents find hard to resist. I am confident his future colleagues will enjoy working with him as much as I did."

I will miss Stephen. He was always thinking down the road, anticipating programs, and protecting me and the Senate from unwise actions. That kind of attention to detail and good judgment is rare and noteworthy.

From the first day he joined my staff, Stephen has been a tremendous asset. He has earned the respect and admiration of his colleagues, and has proven himself as a leader. His journey is only beginning, and I wish him all the best in the months and years to come.

TRIBUTE TO KEVIN LANDY

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I wish today to bid farewell and express my special thanks to Kevin Landy for his 13 years of extraordinary service on the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

Kevin, presently the committee's chief counsel and my longest serving committee staff member, is leaving the Senate this month. But I am happy to say he will continue his career in public service as the Director of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Office of Detention and Policy Planning, an office responsible for formulating and implementing reforms at immigration detention facilities.

As a Senator, I am privileged to work with dedicated Senate staffers like Kevin Landy, who want to take their talents, skills, and passions and put them to work for the American people.

Thomas Jefferson once asked the question: "What duty does a citizen owe to the government that secures the society in which he lives?"

Answering his own question, Jefferson said: "A nation that rests on the will of the people must also depend on individuals to support its institutions if it is to flourish. Persons qualified for public service should feel an obligation to make that contribution."