

a number of reasons, not the least of which is the President is leaving in the next few days for Vietnam and we want to see if that can be completed with a minimum amount of debate and amendments. We are confident and hopeful that can be done.

RECENT ELECTIONS AND LOOKING AHEAD

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I want to take a moment to comment on the recent elections and then a very brief look ahead. First, let me remind my colleagues in every year that we have waged war, our troops have fought to uphold certain ideals: the ideals of democracy, of liberty, and of freedom. They are those very same principles upon which this Nation was founded in 1776 and they are the principles we strive to live by today in 2006. We saw that play out in last week's election, a natural manifestation of those ideals. We saw democracy at work, an opportunity for the American people to speak, to influence Government. So while I, of course, was disappointed in the outcome, we are not discouraged, and people come back today not discouraged because, as I have said, this election was democracy at work.

Change can be tough. Change opens the door, however, to new opportunity, and with that new opportunity comes new hopes. The American people have spoken and now is the time for us to move forward together. That is a very powerful message from the American people: Move forward and move forward together.

For a number of my colleagues—and I think of this as I mention the orientation program that begins for our new colleagues for the next Congress—moving forward means concentrating in part on paving the way for their successors. For them, it is a time of transition. The next few weeks, the last of the 109th Congress, will be my final weeks serving as a Senator, but as most everyone knows, I self-limited my time as a Senator 12 years ago, so I have known every day—every day for the last 12 years—that I would be departing this body next month, and it did help me to keep focused. It kept me grounded in the fact that those of us serving here only occupy our positions of service and that we don't own those positions. As Senate majority leader, my job is to focus on finishing the business of the 109th Congress, and that is where I will be concentrating my efforts.

As I look back on this Congress, the Republican majority has accomplished many things of which I am very proud. We submitted the tax cuts for every American which have helped to create 6 million jobs in the last 3 years. We have waged a bold war on terror, which has prevented every potential terror attack on our soil right here in this country over the past 5 years. We have given seniors prescription drug coverage through Medicare for the first

time, affordable prescription drug coverage. We confirmed outstanding judicial nominees, including two Supreme Court justices. We passed a forward-looking energy bill. We strengthened our commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS here at home and around the world. We have eliminated frivolous class action lawsuits. And we did all of this in one of the most challenging partisan political environments ever.

But as we move forward—and that really does officially begin today—we begin with finishing the business of the 109th Congress, and we must work together to overcome that partisanship we have seen in the past, that crippling partisanship that has plagued us in the recent past. America wants results and America wants solutions, and it is with that focus we enter the waning days of the 109th Congress. We must return to an era of working together in a civil, bipartisan fashion. It is my hope both parties, Republicans and Democrats, will work toward governing together to produce those solutions, to produce those tangible results for the American people. That begins here, and it begins now.

This week the Senate agenda will focus, as we mentioned earlier, on completing the remaining appropriations bills, and in the days and in the weeks ahead, we will consider the nomination of Bob Gates as Secretary of Defense and, as we just stated, the Vietnam trade legislation and the U.S.-India civilian nuclear technology bill. Each of us has many ideas to contribute to the discourse and I know we will continue to do that. We must build on our successes, the successes that make America the best place—the best place—to raise a family, the best place to start a business, and the best place to get and keep a job. Now is the time for us to get back to work.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

MOVING FORWARD

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the elections are over. It is time for us to move forward. It is time to move forward and, in working together, begin the process of moving our great country forward.

Last week the American people spoke for change. In the months ahead, Senate Democrats will fight for change. We are going to focus on three priorities, including bipartisanship. We have to work together. We can't accomplish anything as Democrats standing alone. As has been shown, the Republicans couldn't accomplish anything standing alone. We need to work together to pass legislation on a bipartisan basis and send it to the White House. We must have open government—a new word: “transparency”—and we have to

have results. Bipartisanship is great. But if people don't see what we are doing and there are no results, it is not as it should be.

We have a lot of challenges: health care, energy, the economy, including these deficits we have; Iraq. We need to restore checks and balances. Last Wednesday or Thursday I met a lot of press people in the audience and I said to each of them: I will bet most of you here have never watched a congressional conference in session, a conference committee meeting. It is true. We haven't had one. That is what we used to do here. We used to have them for a couple of hundred years, and for a couple of decades I was involved in them. But during the last at least 6 years, we haven't had any—a conference where we have a House bill and a Senate bill and we have an open meeting, and Republicans make suggestions on how the bill could be made better, and Democrats make suggestions, and there is a vote taken publicly. We haven't done that, and that is not good. We need to do that. That is what I am talking about, open government, these checks and balances our Founding Fathers set forth in that document we call the Constitution, three separate, equal branches of government.

I commend the distinguished majority leader. We worked together here in the Senate to come up with the most significant lobbying and ethics reform in a quarter of a century—since Watergate, actually. We passed that. We passed it on a bipartisan basis. We included not only lobby and ethics reform; we had, as a result of a number of Senators led by DIANE FEINSTEIN, a provision in there dealing with earmarks, to make earmarks more transparent. The bill we passed out of here slowed the revolving door between government employees and lobbyists and eliminated gifts paid for by lobbyists and substantially expanded disclosure by lobbyists. It limited privately funded travel in many instances, and required more disclosure. It stopped dead-of-the-night legislating regarding open meetings. We did this. We should all feel good about what we accomplished in this regard. But, sadly, it went to the House and that was the end of it. So I would hope before the distinguished majority leader ends his career as a Senator, which has been a markedly significant career, that we can do that. It should be the law of the land, and hopefully it will be in the next couple months.

Finally, this Senate and we Democrats will do our very best to focus our energies on the challenges facing our country and take concrete steps to protect our country and help working families get ahead. For too long families have struggled with high health care costs while the big drug companies haven't struggled. I am glad they have not had to struggle, but I think we need to have a more even playing field—especially with insurance companies. For too long, ranchers in Nevada

and farmers all across this country have struggled to fill their tanks with gas and to have enough money in their bank accounts to do that which they need to do. But they have seen these big oil companies get the tax breaks that I personally do not think they deserve. I don't think the American people believe they deserve them either.

For too long, all Americans have worried about the direction of the war in Iraq only to see Congress refuse to have a real debate on the issues. On a personal basis, I have encouraged the President to listen to what the Baker-Hamilton working group has to say, and I know he will do that. I think it is important that he is willing to meet with those people. They are a tremendous group of very patriotic Americans with significant experience. On the Democratic side, as an example, you have the former Secretary of Defense and former Presidential Chief of Staff. They are good people, Democrats and Republicans, who are going to be talking to the President. If we are going to have a new direction in Iraq, the President must listen to new ideas. This is a step in the right direction.

That is why last week I asked the President to convene a bipartisan congressional leadership group and invite other people, too, if he wants, of course. It is his meeting. But if he wants, to have Secretary Baker, Congressman Hamilton, members of the military. I think if we spent a couple of days doing this—however long the President sees fit—I think it would be helpful to have if he heard what we had to say. If we are going to have a new direction in Iraq, the President must listen to new ideas. That is why I felt comfortable in suggesting this to the President.

We Democrats have some very concrete ideas as to what we think should happen. First of all, again on a bipartisan basis, with 79 votes on the Defense Authorization bill for the previous year, Democrats and Republicans joined together to put a provision in that bill that said the year 2006 will be a year of significant transition in Iraq. The year 2006 is coming to an end. We need to implement that law.

We, as Democrats, also offered an amendment that received 40 votes called the Reed-Levin or Levin-Reed amendment, however you want to look at it, to begin a change of course, to set a framework to change course. For example, in that legislation, we called for responsibly redeploying our troops to transform the mission to training, counterterrorism, logistics, force protection. Does this mean pulling all the troops out now? Of course it doesn't. But it does say we must start redeploying troops as soon as possible.

Second, the sectarian differences must be reconciled. They are plaguing the country. We have had in the last 2 days, just that we know of, almost 200 Iraqis killed, 3 American soldiers, 4 British soldiers. We must push for changes to the Iraqi Constitution and power and resource sharing.

I believe it is time for our President to call for a regional conference that he participants in. I spoke to the King of Jordan today. He thought it was a good idea to have the President call for a meeting of the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan—even Syria. It is a regional problem. Let's talk about this regionally. It is more their problem than our problem. They have more to lose or win than we do. So I think a regional conference would be very important to regionalize our strategy.

We must revitalize the failed construction efforts. It was stunning to see in the weekend news how much less oil is being produced there in Iraq than before the war. It was stunning to see how little potable water is being produced there than before the war. And to see that the electricity in Baghdad—as an example, prior to the war it was 16 hours a day, and now it is down to less than 4 hours a day. We have to revitalize our failed reconstruction efforts.

Finally, we have to rebuild our military. We do not have a single undeployed Army unit that is battle ready. Everything is in need of repair or replacement—replenishment. The Pentagon has told us it will cost \$75 billion to bring the military up to what it was before the war. We want to work and see if we can accomplish that. Those are our suggestions.

From Iraq to the economy, there is much to do in the next few weeks and then at the beginning of the new year and a new Congress—so much to do. We must take advantage of the next few weeks and get as much done as we can.

There are 55 Republicans, there are 45 Democrats, we understand that—for the next 60 days. After that, it is going to be a very slim majority that we have, but it is one that we believe will open the door for bipartisanship. I hope, for the good of the American people, we can continue to look forward—not dwell on the past but look forward.

I hope very much we can get our so-called tax extenders done. The reason these are important to do is they are critical tax relief for American families and businesses that will expire if we don't do something—a deduction for college tuition, deduction for State and local sales taxes. The manager of the bill on military construction is Kay Bailey Hutchison from Texas. This has been her issue because the large State of Texas is losing those families' tax deductions, deductions for out-of-pocket expenses incurred by teachers and for businesses, the research and development tax credit, the work opportunity tax credits and Welfare-to-Work tax credits. These things are extremely important. Unless we act to extend this relief in the next few weeks, families will be facing a tax increase next year. That is not acceptable and we need to act.

It is a new day in the Senate. Let's work together and move America forward. I offer my hand to my friends on the other side of the aisle. I have

reached out to my friend, Senator FRIST. We are going to do everything we can to have the country know we are doing good things in the next few weeks. And I reached out to my friend, MITCH MCCONNELL, who I understand will be the next Republican leader, to work together on the issues of the next Congress as we have on many issues in the past.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BIPARTISANSHIP

Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I thank both the majority leader and minority leader for their comments this afternoon and for setting forth the tone of moving forward in a spirit of bipartisanship on behalf of our country. I want to quickly make four points.

It is going to be very important for us in the weeks ahead, and in the new Congress, that we do find the seeds of bipartisanship which we have found in the past in many of the efforts that have gone on in this body. For me, during my first 2 years as a Senator, one of the things I will always remember as one of the best times of the Senate is when we came together with the Gang of 14, with 7 Republicans and 7 Democrats, to make sure that this Senate was able to get beyond the very difficult issue that it faced. I hope we find more and more of those opportunities as we move forward on the great issues of our time, including Iraq, energy, health care, and the rest of the issues with which we must deal as a country.

I will say this as well. In the days ahead, we will hear many things about some of our colleagues, some of whom are newcomers to our institution, the U.S. Senate, and some of them who are leaving. For me, it is a sad day that Senator CHAFEE and Senator DEWINE, who were members of the Gang of 14, will not be around to be a part of that future bipartisan coalition that we are going to have to have in the Senate. But I hope, on the side of both the Democrats and the Republicans, that there is a great number of Members of the Senate on both sides of the aisle who will come together to address those significant issues that face us as a country.

As I spent my time in Colorado for most of the last month and traveled around the State, most of the people in my State were making one statement to us as a Congress and that was to get about the people's business. They want us to do the work that they so fervently want to be accomplished for this country. I believe in my State—which I believe is reflective of what is happening around the country—they want