

Secretary of State. It is a proud moment for this Senate and indeed for the American people. Dr. Rice has served her country with distinction and she has served her country with honor. She has been a steady and a trusted confidant to two Presidents, and as Secretary of State she will apply her long experience and extraordinary skill to meet the greatest challenges of our time—fighting the war on terror and advancing democracy around the globe.

Dr. Rice possesses this rare combination of management and administrative experience, policy expertise, academic scholarship and, not least important, personal integrity and character. Yes, I am disappointed that Dr. Rice's nomination was caught up in partisan politics. While I recognize my colleagues' right to debate the President's nominees, Dr. Rice's obvious qualifications have never, ever been in doubt. Nor was it ever in doubt that a large bipartisan majority would vote to confirm her, which we will see in a few moments. Partisanship has its time and place, but we are at this point in time a nation at war. We need the strength of all of our resources to fight and win. I am disappointed that others on the other side of the aisle have taken this moment to wage a partisan campaign. But it is time for all of us to move on, and we indeed will move forward with this vote.

I look forward to working with Dr. Rice to meet those challenges ahead and I congratulate her on a historic achievement.

Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GRAHAM). Is there a sufficient second?

There is a sufficient second.

Mr. FRIST. I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Condoleezza Rice, of California, to be Secretary of State?

On this question, the yeas and nays have been ordered and the clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. The following Senators were necessarily absent. The Senator from Montana (Mr. BURNS) and the Senator from New Hampshire (Mr. GREGG).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Montana (Mr. BURNS) would have voted "yea."

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber wishing to vote?

The result was announced—yeas, 85, nays, 13, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 2 Ex.]

YEAS—85

Alexander	Bunning	Coleman
Allard	Burr	Collins
Allen	Cantwell	Conrad
Baucus	Carper	Cornyn
Bennett	Chafee	Corzine
Biden	Chambless	Craig
Bingaman	Clinton	Crapo
Bond	Coburn	DeMint
Brownback	Cochran	DeWine

Dodd	Landrieu	Santorum
Dole	Leahy	Sarbanes
Domenici	Lieberman	Schumer
Dorgan	Lincoln	Sessions
Ensign	Lott	Shelby
Enzi	Lugar	Smith
Feingold	Martinez	Snowe
Feinstein	McCain	Specter
Frist	McConnell	Stabenow
Graham	Mikulski	Stevens
Grassley	Murkowski	Sununu
Hagel	Murray	Talent
Hatch	Nelson (FL)	Thomas
Hutchison	Nelson (NE)	Thune
Inhofe	Obama	Vitter
Inouye	Pryor	Voinovich
Isakson	Reid	Warner
Johnson	Roberts	Wyden
Kohl	Rockefeller	
Kyl	Salazar	

NAYS—13

Akaka	Durbin	Lautenberg
Bayh	Harkin	Levin
Boxer	Jeffords	Reed
Byrd	Kennedy	
Dayton	Kerry	

NOT VOTING—2

Burns	Gregg
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The nomination was confirmed.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, we have just had a historic vote in the Senate. By an overwhelming bipartisan majority, 85 to 13, the Senate has voted to confirm Dr. Condoleezza Rice, the first African-American woman to become Secretary of State. It is a proud moment for the Senate and for the American people.

For the information of our colleagues, under our previous agreement we will proceed with Secretary-designate Nicholson. We have a short time agreement. Then we will have a voice vote, followed by Secretary-designate Leavitt. Then, shortly after that, I am hopeful we can proceed with Secretary-designate Bodman.

There have been no requests for rollcall votes on any of those three. If that is the case, we would not expect to have rollcall votes later today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). Under the previous order, the President will be notified that the nominee has been confirmed.

NOMINATION JIM NICHOLSON TO BE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of Executive Calendar No. 5, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Jim Nicholson, of Colorado, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes equally divided between the Senator from Idaho and the Senator from Colorado.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I have been joined by my colleague, Senator AKAKA, the ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to comment briefly on the President's nomination of Ambassador Jim Nicholson to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Nicholson is a man of considerable character and accomplishment. I

am pleased to speak in support of his nomination to serve in this critical post. I am pleased the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, a committee of which I am the newly elected chairman, approved this nomination Monday at the committee's initial meeting of the 109th Congress.

The President has asked Jim Nicholson to accept one of the more difficult jobs in Washington; that is, running the Department of Veterans Affairs. In the best of times this is a tough assignment. In times like the ones we are now entering, times within which the rate of the growth of the VA's budget will likely slow, but also within which the needs of the service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, must and will be met, is a tougher assignment, still. I am highly confident, however, that the President has found the right person for this job.

Let me summarize Jim Nicholson's background. He was born in 1938 to modest circumstances on a farm in Iowa. He left that farm in 1957 to attend the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. After graduation in 1961, he served for 8 years in active service in the Army. He was a ranger and a paratrooper and served a tour in Vietnam from 1965 through 1966 where he earned, among other declarations, the Bronze Star, the Combat Infantryman's badge, the Air Medal, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry.

After returning from Vietnam in 1966, then-Captain Nicholson continued to serve on Active Duty for more than 4 years, followed by an additional 22 years as a Reserve officer. He retired from the Army Reserve in 1991 at the rank of colonel.

While in Active and Reserve service, Mr. Nicholson obtained two advanced degrees, a BA in public policy from Columbia University and a JD from the University of Denver. After practicing law for a relatively brief period in Denver in the 1970s, he launched a very successful real estate development career. Among other positions, he served as chairman and president of Renaissance Homes of Colorado. His business career was also marked with extensive community and charitable activity.

In 1986, Jim Nicholson became a committeeman for the Republican Party's national committee. In 1993, he was elected the Republican National Committee's vice chairman, and then he was elected for a 4-year term as chairman of the Republican National Committee. It was during these years at the helm of the RNC, I grew to know and admire Jim Nicholson. His accomplishments since that time have only increased my respect for the man.

In August of 2001, President Bush appointed Mr. Nicholson U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, the Vatican. From that post he has advocated for religious reconciliation, for religious freedom in China and Russia, and against the international exploitation and enslavement of defenseless persons, commonly referred to as human trafficking.

He has, as well, ably represented the interests of this Nation to this vital diplomatic post in a period of wartime. He has done so by all accounts with great diplomatic skill and steadfastness of the purpose that he was sent to serve.

Veterans are fortunate a man so well-known and respected by the President of the United States will serve as Secretary. I am pleased the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in its first official business meeting of the 109th Congress on Monday, unanimously approved this nomination.

I ask my colleagues to ratify the judgment they were expressing. VA needs a steadfast hand in Jim Nicholson. I hope all of my colleagues will feel similar to those on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

This is not to suggest that VA has lacked a steady hand at the tiller. To the contrary. The stewardship as VA Secretary of former Naval Officer Anthony, or as we came to know him, Tony Principi, has been by any standard one of exceptional merit and distinction. It is a rare Secretary, indeed, who departs from this sensitive post with the words, I believe, that can be expressed about his service as "job well done." Veteran service organizations, leaders from the hill, and other bodies all critically concerned about veterans affairs recognize that Tony Principi managed his job extremely well, and he has managed it while leading VA with impeccable integrity, absolute fairness and objectivity, and unflagging willingness to listen to all affected constituents and an extraordinary sensitivity to the needs and concerns of ordinary rank-and-file veterans.

When the history of the VA is written, Tony Principi will be judged as one of the agencies titans. More importantly, he will also be judged by the ordinary former enlisted men and women whose needs he never lost sight of. On behalf of those persons, I salute the now retiring Secretary, Tony Principi.

I say to my colleagues, I believe Jim Nicholson to be a titan in the making. He has all of the qualities that our President recognized, that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs recognized, as one who can adequately and most appropriately serve this very important agency of our Government and its millions of constituents. I ask the Senate to support the efforts of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs in bringing this nomination to the Senate.

I yield the floor and recognize my colleague and ranking member of the committee, Senator DAN AKAKA.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. AKAKA. Madam President, I rise as a ranking member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. I do it with great expectation and look forward to working with my friend, Chairman CRAIG from Idaho. I look forward to working with the committee. We held our first meeting yesterday, and I would say that it was a great meeting and a good beginning for the committee.

I am also pleased to support the nomination of James Nicholson to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. If confirmed, Ambassador Nicholson will have the responsibility of steering the Department of Veterans Affairs through a period of great transformation.

I recently had a chance to meet with Ambassador Nicholson and to discuss the many challenges he will face in guiding VA through this critical period. I have also had the opportunity to read his answers to prehearing questions that I submitted to him and also to hear his testimony at the January 24, 2005, hearing of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on his nomination. I believe Ambassador Nicholson has the commitment and has the drive and fortitude to maintain America's special obligation to our veterans.

I know with his years of service to this Nation at West Point, in Vietnam, and as Ambassador to the Holy See, Ambassador Nicholson is familiar with the importance of the leadership role he will soon assume at VA. We expect him to hit the ground running to tackle VA's many challenges. And, of course, we will be there to work with him.

It is widely known that on the health care side, VA is facing a crisis situation. In recent years, millions of veterans have come to VA for the first time. As I said yesterday to my colleagues, I think it is good news that millions have turned to VA for care. Some, however, believe we can deal with the burgeoning demand by reducing who is eligible for care. For me, however, this is not the answer. I hope Ambassador Nicholson will see the merits of keeping a full and open system.

In addition to providing basic primary care, the VA system offers programs of enormous value, especially for veterans who are blind or have spinal cord injuries, who need prosthetic devices, or who require dependable mental health care. We must retain these specialized services and, at the same time, ensure that all veterans can have access to the care they have earned through their service.

The VA research program will need some attention as well, as many of our finest physicians chose to come to VA so they can conduct research. Keeping the research program viable is tremendously important. Ambassador Nicholson has his work cut out for him in this regard.

In the past, the Veterans Benefits Administration has come under fire for the lack of timeliness of its claims processing. While VBA has made progress in improving timeliness and accuracy of disability claims processing, further improvement is needed. Notably, VBA has turned its attention to decreasing the amount of time it takes to process a claim and taken its focus off appeals. A more balanced approach must be reached.

We will be looking to Ambassador Nicholson for innovative approaches so that VBA can absorb changes in law and new business processes without always going into a nose dive. Our veterans deserve no less than quality workmanship done in a timely manner.

Ambassador Nicholson's nomination process has been fairly expedited because VA's pressing needs require a new Secretary immediately. However, my committee will continue its strong oversight of the Department, and I encourage other Members to work with us in this endeavor.

Madam President, in my view, Mr. Nicholson is ready for the challenges of this important position. He will bring to it his many experiences as someone who himself served as well as his sincere commitment to the well-being of his fellow veterans. I ask my colleagues to approve this nomination.

Madam President, I yield back the remainder of our time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, let me say forthrightly that we have the Ambassador's nomination on the floor today because of the cooperation of the ranking member, and I greatly appreciate that. Both he and I have reviewed what we believe is the mission of the committee. We are very excited about the work we will do in the coming years to help our veterans and work on their behalf through this important committee. I thank him for his cooperation.

Madam President, I yield to our colleague from Colorado.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. ALLARD. Madam President, first of all, I thank the chairman and ranking member for moving forward with the confirmation of Jim Nicholson to be the new Secretary for the Department of Veterans Affairs. I congratulate them both on assuming their responsibilities as chairman and ranking member on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Madam President, I rise today in strong support of President Bush's nominee for Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Jim Nicholson. I have known and worked with Jim for years in the State of Colorado, and I am proud President Bush has nominated him for this post.

As a West Point graduate, Army ranger, highly decorated combat veteran, and almost 4 years of service as the Ambassador to the Holy See, Mr. Nicholson is well prepared and highly qualified for the duties as the head of the VA. He brings a strong work ethic to his new responsibilities.

Born during the Great Depression, as the third child of seven, Jim Nicholson grew up on a tenant farm in rural Iowa. Both he and his older brother Jack earned appointments to West Point while struggling as a farming family in the Midwest.

Prior to Jim's appointment, his brother returned home from school for

the summer, and his family could not find enough money to send Jim back to New York for the start of his new term. In order to solve this problem, a 15-year-old Jim Nicholson took it upon himself to find a job building railroads through his home State of Iowa. By working as long as 19 hours some days, Jim was able to not only earn enough money to send his brother back to West Point, but also was eventually able to buy his father a used car so he could look for work.

These virtues that Jim displayed as a youth—work ethic, self-sacrifice, and determination—are the very qualities which will allow him to excel in the President's Cabinet.

As a West Point graduate and decorated veteran, this former Army ranger also has the personal experience in the Armed Forces that will serve his new constituency well. During his service in the Army, Mr. Nicholson fought in the Vietnam war and was a highly decorated soldier. He was awarded the Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge, a Meritorious Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Vietnamese Cross for Gallantry, and two Air Medals while spending 8 years on Active Duty and 22 years in the Army Reserve before retiring as a colonel.

Clearly, Senator Nicholson's qualifications after his Army career are just as impressive, including his advanced degrees, starting a successful real estate business, numerous community volunteer efforts throughout Colorado, and finally culminating in his service as an Ambassador to the Holy See. This is a man who has been asked to serve his country in a new capacity and who will answer that call with his own sense of duty and honor.

I urge my colleagues to confirm Jim Nicholson as our next Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today we consider President Bush's nominee to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. At a time when America's men and women in uniform are not only serving but actively fighting in combat, this is a particularly significant nomination for us to consider. This nominee will be responsible for managing the benefits for our longtime veterans as well as those who recently have served and sacrificed for us all.

Those who have served in uniform deserve our Nation's deepest gratitude. Beyond gratitude, we, as a nation, have committed to providing our veterans with certain benefits and services which they deeply deserve in honor of their sacrifice for our common good. These benefits can never fully repay America's debt to her veterans but they are an important expression of our thanks and commitment to their well-being.

Sadly, the delivery of these benefits and services has been less than optimal. Every day, deserving veterans wait too long and wade through needless redtape before receiving the help

to which they are legally and morally entitled.

I am also particularly concerned about the vast disparities in the VA's compensation payments to disabled veterans and the way the current system shortchanges disabled veterans in my State of Illinois.

Illinois now ranks 50th in the Nation in average veteran's disability compensation. While the veterans in some States receive a statewide average disability payment of \$10,000 to \$11,000 per year, veterans in other States—including Illinois, Ohio, Michigan, Virginia, New Jersey and others—receive statewide average disability payments of less than \$7,000 a year. This wide inconsistency should not exist. America's veterans deserve better. The ability of veterans to receive fair and just compensation for service-related disabilities should not depend on where they happen to live.

Unfortunately, this disparity has been left uncorrected for several years. In 2001, the Department of Veterans Affairs' Claims Processing Task Force questioned the consistency of decisions because of factors such as differing interpretations of VA guidance. Then, in 2002 the Government Accountability Office reported that the VA was not systematically assessing decision-making consistency for any specific medical impairments, despite concerns about possible inconsistencies in disability claims decisions made by the VA's 57 regional offices. In that same 2002 report, GAO expressly recommended that the VA assess decision-making consistency for medical conditions requiring difficult judgment. The GAO even suggested a way to do this. The VA could develop hypothetical claims for a specific medical impairment, distribute these claims to multiple adjudicators, and then analyze the variations in the resulting decisions on these claims. These findings and recommendations went unheeded at the Department of Veterans Affairs. This past November, a new GAO report on the consistency of decisions at the VA found that since the issuance of the 2002 report, the VA still had not systematically assessed the consistency of regional office decisions.

Several Senators have joined me in raising this issue with the current Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Secretary Principi. As a result of our expressions of concern, the Inspector General of the Department of Veterans Affairs is currently conducting a review of the Veterans Benefits Administration's system for rating disability claims to determine the reasons for these nationwide differences.

Because the national disparity in veterans disability compensation hits Illinois especially hard, Senator OBAMA and I met with Ambassador Nicholson soon after his nomination to serve as the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs. In our meeting, he indicated to us that he was already aware of the concerns raised about inconsistent decisions at

the VA and the ongoing Inspector General review into the matter.

America's veterans deserve our deepest gratitude. They also deserve a benefits system that is managed in a competent manner so that it produces fair, even and consistent decisions. I will continue to press for action to address the flaws of the current system that leave Illinois veterans shortchanged. I look forward to working with Mr. Nicholson to ensure that our veterans receive all the benefits to which they are entitled.

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, today I rise in strong support of the nomination of R. James Nicholson to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nicholson's predecessor, Anthony Principi, for his service to our Nation's veterans. John Furgess, the National Commander for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said it best when he described Mr. Principi's service to our country. He said that Secretary Principi:

is a true veterans' advocate . . . [who] constantly challenged his staff to improve their services to America's 25 million veterans, and his work to address the needs and concerns of today's newest generation of veterans who are fighting the War on Terrorism typifies his vision and leadership. Secretary Principi wore his compassion and commitment to veterans on his sleeve . . . We applaud him for his service to our country and wish him and his family the best of futures. He will be missed but not forgotten.

Let me turn now to express my admiration and appreciation for the President's choice in nominating Ambassador Nicholson to lead our Nation as it strives to support the veterans who have served so tirelessly on behalf of our country. I know Jim Nicholson to be an intelligent, articulate, and decent man. As a veteran of some distinction himself, he has an excellent appreciation for the issues the Department faces. And, as an accomplished executive, he is incredibly well-suited to lead this large and important agency. These are trying times for our Nation's veterans. As the Vietnam war era veterans begin to retire in greater numbers and our veterans from the war on terrorism return, our Nation must reaffirm its commitment to those who have placed everything on the line for the cause of freedom. I believe that Ambassador Nicholson is an excellent choice to lead our Nation's effort to maintain the sacred covenants between the Nation and its veterans.

A man from humble beginnings, Ambassador Nicholson rose to graduate from West Point and become an Army Ranger who served his country during the Vietnam war. During that conflict, he proved his courage in battle and earned the Bronze Star, the Meritorious Service Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, the Vietnamese Cross for Gallantry, two air medals, and, of course, the Combat Infantry Badge. His service to his country did not end there. He went on to serve for 22 years as an Army Reservist, retiring with the rank

of colonel. Along the way he received a master's degree in public policy from Columbia University and a law degree from the University of Denver. In Denver, he established a reputation as a highly qualified attorney specializing in real estate, municipal finance and zoning law before becoming a highly successful residential real estate developer.

However, his call to service did not end with his years of military service, Ambassador Nicholson entered politics and was elected chairman of the Republican National Committee. His tenure secured him a reputation as a person of the highest ethics and his current position as Ambassador to the Holy See has been a success.

I feel quite confident that those same skills that made Ambassador Nicholson a successful businessman and ambassador will ensure that our veterans receive the support and care they deserve while maximizing the efficiency of this Department.

Therefore, Mr. President, I hope that I will be joined by my colleagues on both sides of the aisle and quickly confirm Ambassador Nicholson to this vital post.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of the nomination of Jim Nicholson to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs. I believe Ambassador Nicholson's 30 years of military service make him an excellent choice to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs. Jim Nicholson's leadership is particularly important as our brave men and women in uniform once again serve the cause of freedom in the fight against terrorism around the globe.

Jim Nicholson has served his Nation faithfully and ably for the majority of his lifetime. I believe his great diversity of experience will be of the utmost benefit to the Department of Veterans Affairs and our veterans. We as a nation have a commitment to our veterans. They and their families have made countless sacrifices to serve in our country's defense, and we have a duty to provide for their needs. Jim Nicholson's leadership of the Department of Veterans Affairs will help us honor this obligation.

Jim Nicholson graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1961, becoming an Army Ranger and a paratrooper. He went on to serve during the Vietnam war. While in Vietnam, he earned the Bronze Star, the Combat Infantry Badge, the Meritorious Service Medal, and the Vietnamese Cross for Gallantry. After his 8 years of active service as a Ranger, Jim served 22 years in the Army Reserve, retiring with the rank of full colonel.

Jim Nicholson has been an esteemed chairman of the Republican National Committee and for the past 3 years he has served as the U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican. Jim holds a master's degree in public policy from Columbia University and a law degree from the University of Denver. On top of these

vast achievements, he has been a successful businessman and community volunteer.

In conclusion, I believe the President has chosen the right person to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs in its very important work, and I strongly support the nomination of Jim Nicholson.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, to my knowledge there is no one else who has requested time to speak on behalf of this nominee. My colleague has yielded. I yield back the remainder of our time and ask for the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Jim Nicholson, of Colorado, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs?

The nomination was confirmed.

Mr. CRAIG. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be dispensed with.

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

NOMINATION OF MICHAEL LEAVITT

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, I understand we are going to soon be voting on the nomination of Mike Leavitt to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services. I have the privilege of being one of Mike Leavitt's friends, one of his political associates, and one of his strongest supporters. I introduced him to the committee at the time of his confirmation hearings. I don't want to add much to the comments I made there, but I do want to take the occasion to note the Senate action with respect to his confirmation and to assure my colleagues here in the Senate, as well as any who might be listening, that the United States is very fortunate to have a man of Mike Leavitt's stature available to us to serve in this important Cabinet-level position.

He served as a Governor but as a Governor who was very innovative in many of the areas where innovation will be called for in his new assignment. He served as a business executive, building a business, growing a business, helping a business to survive. He understands the impact of extra taxes on small businesses, and he will be appropriately prudent, not only in the way he spends money but in the way he promulgates regulations that can impact small business.

He and his wife Jackie are beloved throughout Utah. He is one of only two men ever to be elected to three successive terms as Governor in the history of the State, and there are those who believe that if he had decided to seek a

fourth term, he would have received it without much difficulty. He retired with a very high approval rating. He brings that, plus the performance in his position as the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, to his new assignment.

On behalf of the people of Utah, I wish him well, and I urge my Senate colleagues to give him unanimous confirmation. He will be a superb Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I note that we are in a quorum call. As a member of the Finance Committee, I am going to speak in favor of the Leavitt nomination to outline some of my concerns.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is not in a quorum call.

Mr. WYDEN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, I note that the chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the ranking minority member will be here shortly to speak on the Leavitt nomination. Until they get here, I thought I would summarize my thoughts concerning this nomination.

I come to the Chamber to speak in favor of Mike Leavitt to head the Department of Health and Human Services.

I want to begin my brief remarks by talking about the importance of bipartisanship in the health care field and to note that at the end of the last session of the Congress, there was a bipartisan failure in the health care area, in my view, of enormous ramifications. At the end of the last session of the Congress, the Congress failed to provide the funding necessary for the office of Dr. David Brailer, who is, in effect, the national health care technology point man, to try to modernize decision making, record keeping, telemedicine, and other crucial matters in the health care field. His office, as a result of this bipartisan failure by the Congress, was essentially defunded. So what you have is a situation where both political parties talk a big game about health information technology, or IT. You hear senators of both political parties saluting the promise of this exciting field and talk about how committed they are, but the response of the Congress was to essentially defund it. So rhetoric has been in abundance; concrete support has been lacking.

I come to the Senate floor to say I very much hope—and Mike Leavitt has a great interest in health information technology—that this deficiency is corrected in this upcoming Congress because otherwise there will be great consequences.