

about them—the VA has had two serious leaks on veterans health care data in the last 7 years—and also working to make sure we use a mental status exam when it is indicated and not create a system that is an affront to all the people who have served the country.

With that, I yield the floor.

#### RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, at 12:31 p.m., the Senate recessed until 2:16 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Acting President pro tempore.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### RETURN OF SENATOR TIM JOHNSON

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I rise this afternoon to join my colleagues in welcoming a colleague and a friend, Senator TIM JOHNSON, back to the Senate.

Senator JOHNSON's return today to this illustrious Chamber marks an incredible journey that took him from normal daily life, to near death, to a remarkable recovery.

For the last 8 months, people from all walks of life, both Democrats and Republicans, have approached me wanting to know how Senator JOHNSON was doing, and nearly every single one of those individuals told me they were praying for him.

Shortly after this happened, I was traveling in Iraq and Afghanistan and I ran into military personnel, members of the diplomatic corps, other civilians, all asking how Senator JOHNSON was doing, all offering up their prayers and support.

I happen to believe it was those prayers from across South Dakota, across the United States, and from around the world that brought Senator JOHNSON back from his life-threatening condition.

Since being released from the hospital, Senator JOHNSON has learned how to walk and talk again. His doctors have been amazed at his progress. For some of us, it is no surprise. Having faced him in a closely fought campaign, I know how tough this man is. After all, Senator JOHNSON has a strong Scandinavian background, something we both share. Without question, today marks an important milestone in Senator JOHNSON's recovery.

Many of us will never know the struggles Senator JOHNSON and his

family have been through. In fact, most of us take for granted our health, and we take for granted our time with family and friends, birthdays and holidays.

For me, Senator JOHNSON's experience has made me pause and appreciate the little things that make life so precious. Senator JOHNSON turned 60 in December, and the party, obviously, had to be delayed. Upon returning to South Dakota last week, Senator JOHNSON and his family celebrated both his 60th birthday and Christmas. I am guessing it was his best birthday and Christmas ever.

While Senator JOHNSON and I come from different political backgrounds, we have worked to put our differences aside as we represent the people of South Dakota. In fact, since I was elected to the Senate in 2004, we have worked closely on a number of issues of importance to South Dakota—everything from a highway bill, to an energy bill, to drought relief, water projects, and, of course, saving Ellsworth Air Force Base from closure under the BRAC process.

I firmly believe that because he and I worked to put our differences aside, our offices were able to coordinate easily to serve the State of South Dakota during his hospitalization and recovery.

The Senate is a very close-knit body, and it is noticeable when a Senator is absent for any length of time. Today, however, that absence no longer exists. By the grace of God, through the prayers of thousands upon thousands of Americans, by the support of an amazing wife Barbara and family, and network of friends, and by his sheer will and determination, Senator JOHNSON is back.

TIM, I know today means a great deal to you and to your family, and it is good to see you back in the Senate.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 306, which was submitted earlier today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the resolution.

The legislative clerk read as follows:  
A resolution (S. Res. 306) concerning the return of Senator Tim Johnson:

Whereas Tim Johnson is returning to the United States Senate after an absence to recuperate from an intracranial hemorrhage suffered on December 13, 2006: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That, as Senator Tim Johnson returns to the Senate, his fellow Members of the Senate extend their warmest welcome and express their personal happiness at his return, and offer their very best wishes for his continued good health.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 306) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

Mr. THUNE. Thank you, Mr. President.

(Applause. Senators rising.)

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from South Dakota is recognized.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, thank you. It sure does feel good to be back here again.

I wish to thank Senators THUNE, REID, and MCCONNELL, as well as all my colleagues, for their warm welcome back. In so many ways, the words and prayers from you and your spouses, on both sides of the aisle, supported both Barbara and me and gave us strength. You will never know what that meant to us.

I also wish to thank Representative HERSETH SANDLIN for her incredible support throughout these tough times.

The MILCON appropriations bill is now on the floor, and I must also thank Senator JACK REED for working with my staff and for his leadership on the bill.

Before I get too far along in my remarks, it must already be clear to you that my speech is not 100 percent. My doctors tell me it will get there.

But my thoughts are clear and my mind is sharp, and I am here to be a voice for South Dakota in the Senate. With patience, persistence, and faith I have come back, and my will to keep fighting for South Dakota is strong.

My ability to think is paramount, so I hope now, as I return to my office, people focus on my work more than how quickly I walk these days.

Last week, I went home to South Dakota. Today, I come home to the Senate.

This has been a long and humbling journey—a journey that has taken longer than some people have liked, and I count myself among them.

But I return to work today to this great body with a renewed spirit and a sharper focus. I better appreciate today what individuals and families go through when they face crippling hardship—whether that hardship be the consequence of catastrophic health issues, economic hardship, or lack of an opportunity to reach one's full potential in life. I believe I have been given a second chance at life. I vow to take that second chance and work harder than ever to be the best I can be for my State and for my Nation; to be a voice for those individuals and families who so often are ignored or forgotten; and to fight to live up to the ideals that have made this Nation great. That is my focus and that is my commitment to my constituents back home in South Dakota and to the people of this great Nation, and to my colleagues here in Washington.

It has been the greatest honor of my life to stand for and by the people of South Dakota. I cannot thank them, as well as the Members of this Chamber, enough for your patience and support. Today, my work begins anew. I relish the task. It is great to be home.