Thereupon, at 12:23 p.m., the Senate, having returned to its Chamber, reassembled and was called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. MENENDEZ).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, Senator SPECTER and I are on the floor. We had the pleasure—the entire Senate did—of listening to a joint session presentation by the President of France. It was stunningly good. I have been to a lot of those over the last quarter of a century, and I would put his right up near the top. He was so good.

He spoke about the deep and historic friendship between our two countries. After the speech, I heard Senator JOE LIEBERMAN say to him: President Sarkozy, sometimes we need to be reminded by others of how good we are as a country, how good we have been, and how bright our future can be. That, in effect, is what the President of France told us all as we assembled there.

One thing I wish to mention is one symbol of that friendship is the Legion of Honor Award the President of France presented to seven World War II veterans who are in a category of their own. To be a World War II veteran, a combat veteran, says it all, but to be awarded the Legion of Honor by the French Government puts them in a special category.

One of the presentations was to our own Senator DAN INOUYE, a Congressional Medal of Honor winner—well, you don't win one, it was presented to him. Senator INOUYE is one of the brave men who served our country during World War II. Senator INOUYE, in 1945, was a 20-year-old lieutenant who was grievously injured. He lost one limb and had many other injuries as he was leading an attack in Italy. The President of France recognized the heroism of DAN INOUYE, as we do every day.

Senator INOUYE was the leader of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, composed of only Japanese Americans. So for Senator INOUYE and for the Senate, this is a wonderful day, and I am so thankful to the President of France and the people of France for recognizing Senator INOUYE.

FLOOR SCHEDULE

Mr. President, today, we continue to debate the farm bill. This debate is going well. We had good debate yesterday. I wish they had been more directed toward amendments, but it was a good debate—people for and against the bill. That is what Senate debates are supposed to be about. I am confident the bipartisan cooperation that brought this bill to the floor will continue and result in final passage.

There has been some concern over the amendment process. I have made it clear this bill will not fall victim to nonrelevant amendments, and there was a discussion on the floor with me and a number of other Republican Senators yesterday saying this isn't the way it should be done and we have never done it this way before. But we went back and checked the record and that is the way it is always done. In the last several decades, the farm bill does not have nonrelevant amendments.

On the last farm bill, when Senator Daschle was the leader—he had my job—there was one nonrelevant amendment, and that was a sense-of-the-Senate resolution offered by Senator KYL on the estate tax. We had one of our so-called side by sides, and that was it. All other 18 amendments were all relevant. That is the way it has to be on this bill. It has been recognized for decades that is the only way you can get one done.

I had a productive conversation with Senator MCCONNELL last evening about the process, and I hope we can work something out on the amendments. It is something we need to do, and ultimately that is what we will do. The sooner we do it, the better off we are.

Tomorrow, I am confident and hopeful the Committee on Justice, State, and Housing and Urban Development will meet and confer in conference and come up with proposals so we can bring this to the floor and work out whatever we can do with the remaining bills. Most all the work has been done. I have spoken to Senator MIKULSKI. She has talked to her counterpart in the House, Chairman MOLLOHAN, and they have worked with their Republican counterparts, and so it is something we should get done as quickly as possible.

These bills are extremely important to America's safety and well-being. The Commerce-State-Justice bill deals with, among other things, the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration, so it is an important bill and I hope we can move forward on that very quickly.

Today, we turn to the Veterans, Labor, Health, and Education conference report. It is an important bill. The labor aspect of it is chaired by Senator HARKIN and Ranking Member Senator SPECTER. I feel about them—about HARKIN and SPECTER—as I have for a long time about the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee. Senator DOMENICI and I were the chair and ranking member of that for as long as a lot of people can remember, and for Senator DOMENICI and I, who was chair and I was ranking member, it didn't matter that much because we knew the bill and I think we did a fair job of working that bill. I feel the same way about this Labor-HHS bill. It doesn't matter who is the chair, whether it is HARKIN or SPECTER, because we always get a good product. They have done wonderful things and come up with new proposals.

We hear a lot about stem cell research. That idea, legislatively, originated in that subcommittee. They were the first ones who got us focused on that.

I appreciate their hard work. I think they have done a tremendously good job. There is no reason this package should not enjoy the same overwhelming bipartisan support the individual bill received; that is, the Labor-HHS bill passed here, and I will talk about it here in a minute. The Military Construction-VA got 90-some-odd votes. Both the Veterans and Labor, Health, and Education parts of this bill are just as important as the VA part. The original VA bill passed the Senate overwhelmingly. Democrats and Republicans joined to support this legislation that will address the critical funding shortages that have left tens of thousands—not hundreds, not thousands—tens of thousands of our veterans without the care they have earned and left them without it for far too long.

I am sorry to say the Bush administration has underfunded the VA for years, but no more dramatically has it been underfunded than the request by the President this year. The result of this short shrift and mismanagement has been made so very clear, painfully clear, by the crisis at Walter Reed. The scandal at Walter Reed Medical Center merely highlighted the problem. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have stretched the VA to a breaking point. The number of uninsured veterans has skyrocketed. The personal data of millions of vets has been lost or destroyed. Thousands of American veterans we call heroes wait endlessly for treatment because their claims are caught in a bureaucratic nightmare. You can't say you support the troops but leave them high and dry when they return home.

That is why this legislation includes the largest increase in funding for veterans care in the history of our country. We provide almost $4 billion more than the President's request, funds that will go straight to the core of the problem, making right the awful conditions at Walter Reed and other veterans military facilities, yet will ensure that veterans' personal data is safeguarded. We will make sure that research in post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, and other all-too-common illnesses our returning troops face is dealt with quickly and, most importantly, greatly expand the number of claims managers and health care workers to provide our heroes with the efficient, high-quality care they have so bravely earned.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, at the outset, I thank the majority leader for his kind words about the cooperation between Senator HARKIN and myself in structuring the appropriations bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. As I have said, when the gavel has changed hands, it has been a seamless exchange.

SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE

Before commenting on the conference report on Labor, Health and