

that VA does well. I think it is also important to acknowledge the amazing things VA is accomplishing each and every day. For instance, patient satisfaction at VA medical centers remains high throughout the country as does the quality of care veterans receive. VA has taken an aggressive stance on homelessness by pursuing the ambitious goal of eliminating veteran homelessness by 2015 and continues to make significant progress in reducing the number of veterans living on the street. Finally, the VA continues to make significant advances in health care through its world-class research programs.

These are the realities and the challenges facing any nominee for a leadership position at the Department. I firmly believe Sloan Gibson is uniquely qualified to address these challenges. Mr. Gibson has a history of service to this Nation that has provided unique insights into the challenges confronting the servicemember and veteran communities. Mr. Gibson began his service as a cadet at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He graduated in 1975 and went on to serve as an infantry officer, earning airborne and ranger qualifications during his military service. His service to this country, however, did not end when Mr. Gibson left military service. He continues this tradition of service today by leading the United Service Organizations, commonly known as the USO, which has the important mission of lifting the spirits of America's troops and their families.

I feel the relationships Mr. Gibson has developed with the Congress and senior leaders within the Department of Defense during his tenure at the USO will serve him well as Deputy Secretary. Collaborative efforts between VA and DOD such as the Integrated Electronic Health Record and Integrated Disability Evaluation System have the potential to make the delivery of benefits and services much more efficient and to provide servicemembers with a smooth transition to civilian life. Yet, these efforts continue to face significant challenges. VA needs a Deputy Secretary like Sloan Gibson who will be able to provide the leadership attention necessary to ensure continued and meaningful collaboration between the Departments.

Sloan Gibson also has the business experience, gained from service in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, necessary to serve as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Following military service, Mr. Gibson spent 20 years serving in a number of positions within the banking industry. This service included 11 years as an executive at AmSouth Bancorporation. He retired from AmSouth in 2004 as vice chairman and chief financial officer.

Sloan Gibson's tradition of service, business experience, and educational qualifications make him well suited to manage the day-to-day operations of

one of this Nation's largest Cabinet Departments. I am confident that if confirmed Mr. Gibson's service as Deputy Secretary would improve the lives of America's veterans and their families and as chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee I look forward to working with Mr. Gibson to do just that.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting today to confirm the nomination of Sloan Gibson to serve as Deputy Secretary at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Sloan D. Gibson, of the District of Columbia, to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs?

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table.

The President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will resume legislative session.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

MODERNIZING CUBA POLICY

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, today the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin American Center released a new, bipartisan public opinion survey on Americans' views about U.S. policy toward Cuba which should be read by every Member of Congress. The findings of this thorough and wide-ranging poll will surprise many. For instance, not only do Floridians—and Cuban-Americans in Florida—favor new policy approaches, but they do so in even larger numbers than do Americans in other regions of the Nation.

It is time—past time—to modernize our policies and the frozen-in-time embargo on Americans' travel and trade with Cuba that have accomplished nothing but to give the Cuban regime a scapegoat for the failures of the Cuban economy. Change will come to Cuba, but our policies have delayed and impeded change. It is time to elevate the voice of a crucial stakeholder: the American people. Thanks to this poll, they are silent no longer.

It is time to recognize that U.S. policy toward Cuba has been unsuccessful in achieving any of its objectives. There is no disagreement among Amer-

icans on both sides of the issue about the desire for a government in Cuba that respects individual liberties. We want to see freedom of expression Cuba, just as we want to see American citizen Alan Gross, who has been imprisoned there for more than 4 years, come home. The disagreement is over how best to achieve that.

Just about the only beneficiary of our embargo has been Cuba's current regime.

The poll shows that a solid majority of Americans, including Cuban-Americans, favor a different course.

Trade with Latin America is the fastest growing part of our international commerce. Rather than isolate Cuba with outdated policies, we have isolated ourselves. Our Latin, European and Canadian friends engage with Cuba all that time. Meanwhile, U.S. companies are prohibited from any economic activity on the island.

This new detailed survey paves the way for a policy toward Cuba that is in the national interest of the United States as a whole. That is what the country needs, it is what the American people have made clear they want, and it is the responsibility of the White House and the Congress to act.

Let us have the common sense, and the courage, to finally put an end to the Cold War in our own hemisphere.

In this same spirit of bipartisanship as this public opinion poll, Senator JEFF FLAKE and I joined together in writing a guest column about the compelling reasons to change these antiquated policies. Our piece appeared today in the Miami Herald. I call it to the attention of the Senate, and I invite other Senators to join in re-examining and changing our self-defeating approach in our relationship with Cuba and the Cuban people. I ask unanimous consent that the article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Miami Herald, Feb. 11, 2014]

TIME FOR A NEW POLICY ON CUBA

(By PATRICK LEAHY and JEFF FLAKE)

We are in the fifth decade—more than half a century—of our country's embargo toward Cuba. During that time the Soviet Union has ceased to exist. Apartheid in South Africa has ended. We have re-established diplomatic relations with the communist governments of China and Vietnam. Still, the United States has refused to reexamine the political and economic embargo on Cuba.

A majority of Americans, including Cuban-Americans, wants to change course. So do we.

A new public opinion poll commissioned by the Atlantic Council's Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center and carried out by a team of highly respected pollsters from both sides of the aisle shows a stark contrast between current American attitudes and the archaic U.S. embargo.

A solid majority of Americans from every region and across party lines supports normalizing relations with Cuba. When asked about specific elements of the policy—such as undoing the ban on travel by Americans to Cuba, facilitating financial transactions,