

We will move forward to confirm Crystal Nix-Hines to be U.S. Permanent Representative for UNESCO; Michael J. McCord to be Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller; R. Jane Chu, Chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts for a term of 4 years; and then we will move forward on Todd A. Batta to be Assistant Secretary of Agriculture.

At 1:45 p.m. this afternoon there will be three rollcall votes on the confirmation of three Federal Reserve nominations: Lael Brainard to be a member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System; Jerome H. Powell to be a member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System; and Stanley Fischer to be Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 11:30 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time being equally divided or controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first 30 minutes and the majority controlling the next 30 minutes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum, and I ask unanimous consent that the time be charged equally.

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

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Mr. McCONNELL. Yesterday the Senate passed bipartisan legislation to address the VA scandal. The Sanders-McCain bill will increase patient choice, it will infuse some much needed accountability into the VA system, and it was important for us to show some urgency in addressing the crisis. That is why I voted for it, and that is why I am glad that the majority leader decided to move forward on this effort, even if it took a vote to set aside a par-

tisan bill in order to take up this important bipartisan legislation.

It will now go to conference so it can be improved further. The sooner the bill managers begin negotiations with their colleagues in the House, the sooner we can get a bill on the President's desk. I am optimistic they will do just that.

As I have said all week, the systemic failures and scandals we have seen within the administration are a national disgrace. When you see 100,000 veterans—100,000 of them—waiting for care, that is a national disgrace. When you see so many veterans waiting 3 months or longer just to get an appointment, that is a national disgrace. And when you see veterans dying before they even receive care they were counting on, it is completely unacceptable.

So this problem needs to be solved, and there is more to be done. A lot of the responsibility here resides with the President himself. He still needs to nominate a capable manager who possesses the necessary skills, leadership, and determination to fix this scandal. He needs to support the thousands of VA workers committed to serving our veterans and to provide all those who serve bravely with the timely care they deserve, and he needs to use all the tools in his toolbox to address the systemic management failures—both the tools he already has and the new ones we can provide him, such as those contained within the legislation we passed yesterday. Our veterans have waited long enough for care, and they shouldn't be made to wait any longer.

90TH BIRTHDAY OF PRESIDENT GEORGE H.W. BUSH

Mr. McCONNELL. Obviously much of Washington's focus this week has been on doing right by our veterans. That is exactly what we should be doing. We owe so much to the men and women who protect us. In that spirit I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge an important milestone just reached by one of America's most famous veterans.

Today our Nation's 41st President, George H.W. Bush, turns 90. It is a rare milestone. Only 4 other presidents have ever reached it: Herbert Hoover, John Adams, Gerald Ford, and the man President Bush once served under, Ronald Reagan.

Beyond wishing him a very happy birthday, I want to acknowledge President Bush's extraordinary record of service. On his 18th birthday the future President volunteered as a World War II Navy pilot, going on to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross for bravery. From there he would go on to excel in a dizzying number of fields as a businessman, a Congressman, a diplomat, CIA Director, leader of his party, Vice President and President, and Commander in Chief during Desert Storm and Desert Shield.

Even his post-Presidency has been marked by continuing and gracious

willingness to serve. Yet for all of his professional distinction, I know President Bush's favorite job never appeared on his resume. It was his role as proud husband to Barbara, who also turned a year older this week, and as the father of five adoring children and proud grandfather and great-grandfather. Maybe that is why every time you see him these days he always has a big smile on his face and a lively pair of socks on his feet. With a loving family like that, it is not hard to see why.

So I am proud to cosponsor the resolution we agreed to yesterday honoring this good man and former President for such a long lifetime of service. I know my colleagues join me in sending President Bush the warmest of birthday wishes.

TRIBUTE TO MARTHA J. CASSITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, one final note concerning our Nation's veterans. I want to honor an exemplary citizen of my home State, the Commonwealth of Kentucky, who has devoted her life to service of our country. Martha J. Cassity is a veteran of the U.S. Army, a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and this Saturday she will be named the first female veteran State commander of the Kentucky VFW. Her ascension to this post is an accomplishment I believe is deserving of recognition and praise here in the Senate.

Martha was born on September 29, 1957, in my hometown of Louisville. She was raised there by her parents Joan and Charles Blanford. While attending Western High School, Martha joined the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars in 1974, thus beginning her life of devoted service to her country.

The stated mission of the Ladies Auxiliary is to serve "the veterans of this country and our communities in honor of the sacrifices and commitment of every man and woman who has served in uniform." For 9 years Martha worked tirelessly to advance this mission, holding multiple chairmanships in the organization.

Martha joined the U.S. Army in October of 1984 as a track vehicle repairer and gave 10 years of honorable service to the Army, including postings in Germany and South Korea. She became eligible to join the VFW while stationed in South Korea, and she did so in 1991.

Upon returning from South Korea, Martha was stationed at Fort Stewart, GA, where she was injured during the battalion's preparations for Operation Desert Storm. She was honorably discharged in 1994. After leaving the Army, Martha earned her associate's degree in applied science from Alabama Southern Community College. Although her days in the military were behind her, Martha's service to America and her fellow veterans would continue. Since 1999 Martha has been heavily involved in the Veterans of Foreign Wars. She has held numerous chairmanships and chairs on the post and