

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

Thank you and, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

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

Mr. REID. Mr. President, before my Republican colleagues leave the floor, I want to repeat what I said this morning when the Senate opened—the only person here was Senator MCCONNELL—and that is what the Republicans have done during the illness of Senator JOHNSON has been exemplary. There have been occasions when, for partisan advantage, the minority could have taken advantage of the majority as a result of TIM being incapacitated. That was never done, even though there were opportunities to do that. As I said this morning, I personally appreciate that. I know the Johnson family does. More importantly, Mr. President, the American people do. This is the Senate, and I will always remember during the past 8 months as we have waited for TIM to return how—I repeat—the Republicans never once tried to take advantage of his illness. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

Mr. President, TIM JOHNSON is a fourth generation South Dakotan. I want to underline the fact that JOHN THUNE and TIM JOHNSON remind me of HARRY REID and JOHN ENSIGN, because we too had a very difficult race for the Senate, and it ended up very similar to the THUNE-JOHNSON race. But we have set those differences aside and now are friends. Above all, I say to my friend JOHN THUNE, I admire and appreciate what you have done in helping TIM in his absence and for being the person who would not allow anything to be done that would in any way harm TIM JOHNSON on a partisan basis. Thank you very much, JOHN.

I have learned a lot about TIM JOHNSON in the past 8 months. I know he went to school at the University of South Dakota, that it is there he met Barbara, his wife. It is in a town called Vermillion that he started his law practice, and it is there that he saw success in the legal field. He served 4 years, starting in 1982, in the House of Representatives in the State of South Dakota. He has received many awards: Outstanding Citizen of the State of South Dakota, first recipient of the Billy Sutton Award for legislative achievement. He was elected to the House in 1986. During that year he was responsible for passing more legislation than any of the other 50 first-term Members.

He has now been in the Senate doing outstanding work. I noticed on his resume, of course, he listed the Appropriations Committee, the Budget Committee, the Banking Committee, the Energy Committee, the Indian Affairs Committee, but he left off the Ethics Committee. He was chosen on that committee to be the chair of that committee, because he is the example of an ethical, honest legislator and person.

TIM and Barbara still have their home in Vermillion, but I have gotten to know that family so well. Brooks served and is serving in the U.S. Army, having been a combat veteran in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. He is now an Army recruiter. Brendan is a lawyer and has a law practice and is doing excellent work. Kelsey and I—during her father's illness—spent lots of time together, especially waiting for her brothers to come. It took a couple of days for them to get here from around the country, as air travel out of South Dakota is not that easy.

As you proceed through life, you find people that you have such admiration for. Of course, we all admire TIM. But there is a person in this Chamber—and I know the Senate rules. We are not to refer to people in this Chamber, but I hope people will forgive me today in recognizing someone I will never forget, and that is his loving wife Barbara.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

I think Barbara and I will never forget—TIM was unconscious at the time—the first night TIM got sick. The reason I mention this is there was a doctor—and I don't want to in any way embarrass TIM or his family, but I think the man deserves recognition. I was asked to be with Barbara, and I was happy to be there with the children coming that first terrible afternoon. Things weren't going well. Barbara recognized it at first that he wasn't doing well. The doctor came and said, We are going to have to relieve the pressure. I am going to have to go into his skull. I said to this doctor, How many times have you done that? He said, Innumerable times. He was not an old man, but he was surrounded by old neurologists and neurosurgeons.

He came back a while later, an hour and a half, maybe, and he said, I am going to have to do an angiogram; I don't know what is going on in his brain. So they put something in to look at his brain. I said, How many times have you done that? He said over a thousand times. Then he comes back about an hour and a half or 2 hours later and tells us they are going to have to operate on TIM. It is going to take a long time, probably about 7 hours. After he worked all of this time, I said to him, Who is going to do this, because he had to be getting tired by then. He looked at Barbara with these piercing eyes, and said, I am going to do it. That is what I do. He said, I am not only a neurosurgeon, I have a subspecialty in the blood supply to the brain. He walked out of that room, and we had so much confidence in his ability that we felt TIM was going to make it. That man's name is Dr. Vivek Deshmukh. I haven't had the opportunity—I wanted to make sure TIM came back here—but some day I am going to be able to express to him on a personal basis how he handled this man's illness. TIM wasn't there, only in spirit, but this doctor deserves recognition, and I hope that is what I do with my little speech here today.

Amidst the daily scuffles that take place here in the Senate, we have the press, but many Americans may not realize we are a family. We sometimes joke about it, but we are, and this proves it. Sometimes people say this Senate family is dysfunctional, and maybe sometimes it is. But despite our quarrels on policy and politics, the 100 men and women who serve in this Chamber have the deepest respect and admiration for each other. We care about each other's health, families, and all the things that go on outside the walls of this Capitol building. I have dear friends, and we all do in this Chamber, but my admiration and respect for TIM JOHNSON is difficult to calculate.

When he fell ill in December of last year, we were all touched by this unfortunate incident. But as we look at what happened, we have heard this overused term: Maybe it was a blessing in disguise, because TIM JOHNSON was taken immediately to George Washington Hospital where they have a team of physicians as good as any place in the world to take care of his injury—maybe not of other injuries, not other illnesses, but for this one it is as good as any place in the country. Had it happened the next day, he would have been on an airplane going to South Dakota. Had it happened the next day, he would have been on an Indian reservation in South Dakota. So maybe, maybe his misfortune was a blessing. Maybe it was a blessing.

We all prayed for him. We all hoped for his recovery. We couldn't watch his recovery because he was away from us most of the time. We all prayed for his recovery with hope for his strength. TIM's wonderful wife Barbara, whom I have already mentioned, said last month:

I have learned a lot about Tim Johnson during the last months. I have learned that he is extremely determined. How he has gotten through this and maintained an even balance I will never understand. His sense of humor and just the: OK, I know what I have to do, I am going to go ahead and do it, and he does it.

So these past months, with humor and determination that Barbara mentioned, we all in the Senate now know what she is talking about.

TIM, I am so glad you are back. I am so happy that your mind is 100 percent. We have all been told your speech shortly will be 100 percent, and you should know it is 95 percent right now. We throw words around like we are happy to have you back, but I have to say in front of the whole world, TIM, we love you. I love you.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on behalf of the entire U.S. Senate Republican Conference, let me say as well, we welcome back to the Senate our good friend, the senior Senator from South Dakota. The entire Senate family was

thrown into a state of shock and worry when TIM JOHNSON was rushed to the hospital for emergency brain surgery last December. The person who seemed most calm was the woman we just recognized up in the gallery: his wife Barbara. She struck an early note of hope. She said she and the rest of the Johnson family were “encouraged and optimistic.” Those aren’t the words most of us would choose in a moment such as that, but the Johnsons had been there before, and they seemed to know TIM would be back, back here, before all was said and done; they would make sure of it.

TIM credits Barbara with helping him overcome prostate cancer in 2004, and it was his support that helped her through a couple of serious illnesses of her own. They always overcame the obstacles, working as a team, determined to push through. They are real fighters. For many, this seemed as if it would be the fight of their lives.

But just 2 months after surgery, Barbara and the Johnson children, Brooks, Brenda, and Kelsey, were telling people, “We’ve got our TIM back.”

TIM was completely focused on recovery. He went through weeks and weeks of intense rehab. And soon enough, he started to get back to the clips and do the office work from his hospital bed.

When they released him from rehab, this gritty great-grandson of a South Dakota homesteader made a bold decision—actually a prediction—saying he was absolutely “determined to get back in the saddle.”

Thanks to the committed care of doctors and therapists, the prayers of constituents and colleagues, and, above all, the loving care of Barbara and their children, TIM’s Senate colleagues can also say, with a real sense of joy, that they too “have their TIM back.”

I yield the floor.

(Applause.)

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I join in this chorus to say how privileged and humbled I am to stand before this body and welcome back my friend and fellow colleague, Senator TIM JOHNSON. TIM and I served in the House together. We came to the Senate in the same year. I went up to campaign in South Dakota, and he has been a great friend to Illinois. I have known him more than 20 years.

I remember when I heard he had been stricken. I was stunned, as everybody was across America. As has been said before, the prayers of millions reached out to TIM and his family in their hour of need.

For those who don’t know TIM JOHNSON, he is not a typical politician. He doesn’t really struggle for media attention, as some of us might; but he got a lot more attention than he ever thought he would because the whole world watched anxiously during those moments of surgery and recovery and rehabilitation. There wasn’t a place

you would go anywhere in America that TIM JOHNSON wasn’t asked about. “How is he doing?” “What is the latest?” “When is he coming back?”

Those of us who knew TIM and what he had done in the Senate and House, those of us who know his great family knew he would be back. He is one of those tough Scandinavians—not really flashy but solid. You just knew he was going to make it. I thought to myself, of all of us who could have suffered this terrible illness, this is one man who will be able to make it back. I also knew something that has already been alluded to. When TIM and Barbara took those vows to stand by one another in sickness and in health, they really meant it because they have proved it over and over again to one another. Loreta and I went by the hospital one day and it wasn’t a good day to visit, so we left a note. We have come to know how close they are and supportive of one another.

It wasn’t just Barbara’s strength but the strength of the whole family that came through in TIM’s recovery. He has done such a remarkable job today. He has brought out the humanity of the united states Senate. We can put aside the issues and the bickering, the fighting and the party labels, and really show that, when it gets down to it, we are part of a family that really cares about one another on a personal basis.

We are so glad to have you back, TIM. We wish you the best. We will be back in the Appropriations Committee fighting for South Dakota and Illinois real soon. Thank you.

(Applause.)

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

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SANDERS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

JOSHUA OMVIG SUICIDE PREVENTION ACT

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor at this TIME to respond a little to the comments made prior to the recess for our Republican and Democratic caucuses today, made on the floor by the Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. COBURN, regarding the bill called the Joshua Omvig Suicide Prevention Act. I want to lay out what the bill does, where we are on it, and respond to some of the objections that the Senator from Oklahoma raised.

Shortly before the Senate adjourned for the August recess, we sought unanimous consent to pass this bill, the Joshua Omvig Suicide Prevention Act, and send it to the President for his signature. Unfortunately, an objection was lodged on the other side of the aisle by—as we know from this morn-

ing—the Senator from Oklahoma. I am saddened by the objection to this legislation.

My staff and I have spent a great deal of TIME trying to understand the reasons behind this objection and respond to the concerns that have been raised. I thought it would be helpful for my fellow Senators, and anyone who is watching, if I took some TIME to review why I believe the Senate needs to act now to pass this important bill, and why I find it so puzzling that one Senator would object.

Let me give a little bit of history. I introduced this legislation, along with my colleague from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, after learning about the case of a young Iowan—his name was Joshua Omvig—who tragically took his own life shortly after returning home from an 11-month deployment in Iraq. Joshua was a member of the U.S. Army Reserve, 339th MP Company, based in Davenport, IA. Before leaving for Iraq, he was a member of the Grundy Center Volunteer Fire Department and the Grundy Center Police Reserves. He was honored to serve his country in the Reserves and hoped to return to his community to serve as a police officer. Please remember what I just said. He was honored to serve his country in the Reserves, and he hoped to return to his community to serve as a police officer. Keep that in mind. I will return to it later.

His family is convinced that if the Veterans’ Administration had more services for veterans in place, Joshua would have received the help he needed and he would still be alive. But rather than withdrawing into their grief, Joshua’s parents have dedicated themselves to ensuring no other family has to suffer this way. Ellen and Randy Omvig, Joshua’s parents, have assisted countless veterans and their families in navigating the VA system. They have been outspoken advocates of improved mental health services for servicemembers and veterans. In April, the Omvigs testified before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on the importance of appropriate suicide prevention, early detection, and treatment programs for our veterans. The goal of the Joshua Omvig Act is simple: to improve suicide prevention and early detection and to improve assistance to veterans in crisis in order to prevent suicides among those who have so bravely served our country.

We know there is an urgent, overwhelming need for this bill. A study in last month’s issue of the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health found that those who have been in combat are twice as likely to commit suicide as those who have never served in a war.

The Veterans’ Administration estimates that more than 5,000 veterans take their lives each year. These numbers are certain to increase dramatically, given the growing number of soldiers returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Suicide rates are 35