

entire career, the error should not disqualify him. Eric Holder should be confirmed as Attorney General.

That statement of support is from James Comey, a Republican, and the chief prosecutor of Marc Rich who was entrusted with major responsibilities in the Department of Justice under President Bush. He is a man who knows that Department very well.

Mr. Comey's opinion is also shared by Larry Thompson, another prominent Republican who served for several years as Deputy Attorney General under President Bush. Mr. THOMPSON had this to say about Eric Holder and the Rich pardon:

There's no way you can have a high-profile job in Washington like the deputy attorney general without attracting some kind of controversy. That matter has been fully investigated, and it should be put behind him.

Let me also read the statement of another high-profile Republican, Ed Rogers, who served in two Republican White Houses. Mr. Rogers said:

Under the Constitution, the President's authority to pardon is unlimited. There was no deceit or malfeasance by Holder. Everyone knows this was Bill Clinton's initiative. Eric Holder is innocent.

Then he added:

the Rich pardon is no bar to Eric Holder being an effective Attorney General—even though we Republicans and some in the media will enjoy rehashing it.

You can question Eric Holder's judgment in the Marc Rich case, but you can't question his integrity, his independence, and his character.

A few days ago the Senate Judiciary Committee received a letter of support for Eric Holder from 10 prominent Republican lawyers, including former Attorney General William Barr and former chief counsel to Senator ARLEN SPECTER of Pennsylvania, Michael O'Neill. This is what the letter said:

Due to his character and experience, Eric today enjoys the endorsement of literally thousands of law enforcement officials from across the country, including NAPO (the National Association of Police Organizations), NDAA (National District Attorneys Association), PERF (Police Executive Research Forum), NSA (National Sheriffs' Association), NAAUSA (National Association of Assistant U.S. Attorneys), and NOBLE (National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives). . . . As former federal prosecutors and senior officials of the Department of Justice we are profoundly aware of the challenges that the Department and the country are facing. Eric Holder is the right man at the right time to protect our citizens in the critical years ahead.

It is worth noting that Eric Holder also has the public support of former FBI Director Louie Freeh, as well as the National Fraternal Order of Police, which is the world's largest organization of sworn law enforcement officers.

One final point: Eric Holder is a historic selection. If confirmed, he would be the first African-American Attorney General in our Nation's history. When I was growing up, there were laws in some States that prevented African Americans from drinking out of the same water fountains as Whites, at-

tending the same schools, and using the same restrooms, restaurants, swimming pools, and other public accommodations. It is one more measure of how far America has come that we now have a chance to confirm a distinguished African American to be the top law enforcement officer in America.

After 8 years of the Justice Department trampling the Constitution and often putting politics over principle, we now have a chance to confirm a nominee with strong bipartisan support who can restore the Justice Department to its rightful role as the protector of our laws and renew America's faith in our system of justice.

This week, before the Senate Judiciary Committee, on which the Presiding Officer also serves—we will have an opportunity to ask questions of Mr. Holder. I will be asking him many of the same questions I have asked of former Senator Ashcroft, Mr. Gonzales, and Mr. Mukasey.

The answers, I am sure, will be significantly different, showing that we are about to launch a significant change in America, a change which the American people voted for overwhelmingly in November and a change that will be carried forward in a very positive way at the Department of Justice by Eric Holder as our next Attorney General.

I yield the floor.

TRIBUTE TO MITCH MCCONNELL

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President. I rise today to honor my good friend MITCH MCCONNELL, the Senate minority leader whose strong leadership, sterling example and wise counsel have earned him an honored position within the ranks of the extraordinary public servants who now serve or have served in the U.S. Senate.

Senator MCCONNELL is the second Kentuckian to lead his party in the U.S. Senate, the first being Senator Alben Barkley, who led Senate Democrats from 1937 to 1949. MITCH is now the longest-serving Republican Senator in Kentucky history, eclipsing the previous record held by the legendary Senator John Sherman Cooper.

Today, Senator MCCONNELL has been serving as a U.S. Senator for almost a quarter century. During that time, four U.S. Presidents, scores of colleagues, and several crises have come and gone, but MITCH has carried on with courage, boldness and steadfastness. He has weathered the most turbulent political seas and has always been a calming influence on his Senate colleagues while at the helm.

Few would have predicted that Senator MCCONNELL would have such staying power when he was first elected to the Senate in 1984 by a razor-thin margin—less than half a percentage point. But political pundits and prognosticators often only skim the surface or state the obvious and give short shrift to the characteristics that matter most in the making of an outstanding leader.

In other words, they didn't really know MITCH MCCONNELL. They didn't know about how he overcame polio at age 2, undergoing an intensive therapy regimen at the Roosevelt Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation and obeying doctors' orders not to walk or run for 2 years. That took determination, and MITCH showed that early on.

Senator MCCONNELL's service to his State and Nation is as varied as it is impressive. After serving as a student body president and graduating with honors at the University of Louisville College of Arts and Sciences in 1964, he went on to law school at the University of Kentucky, where he was elected president of the Student Bar Association and earned a law degree.

He followed that by working as an intern for Senator John Sherman Cooper and as a chief legislative assistant to Senator Marlow Cook, which provided him with invaluable experience in Washington, DC. Other stints followed: He was deputy attorney general under President Gerald R. Ford and a county judge-executive in Kentucky until he was sworn in as a U.S. Senator on Jan. 3, 1985.

In whatever position Senator MCCONNELL has served, he has unfailingly served with distinction. I have had the good fortune of working with MITCH for years, dating back to his election as a freshman Senator, when he became the first Republican to win a statewide race in Kentucky since 1968. In fact, MITCH was the only Republican in the Nation in 1984 to defeat a Democrat incumbent.

To his considerable credit, MITCH has been defying the odds ever since. For example, during his tenure as chairman of the National Republican Senatorial Committee during the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Republicans controlled the Senate—in large part due to his leadership.

MITCH MCCONNELL is a conservative's conservative who gets high marks from the American Conservative Union and all who know him. Moreover, he is a scholar and able defender of the Constitution and this great country. Knowing just how deadly terrorists can be, he is deadly serious about protecting America. He also is an outspoken advocate of the first amendment and a tremendous parliamentary tactician. When MITCH MCCONNELL talks, people listen and pay heed—almost always with excellent results.

As good a Senator as MITCH is, he is an even better man—one who places principals above partisanship. His love for his State and our Nation is second to none. He also is loyal, honest and unflappable, which explains why he is held in such high esteem by his Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

MITCH is a devoted family man. He is the proud father of three beautiful daughters and the loving husband of outgoing U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao. And he is utterly devoted to the people of Kentucky he so ably

represents and honors with his stellar service.

At this time, I wish my colleague and dear friend success, health and happiness as he continues his leadership and service in the 111th Congress. I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to work with him over the years and look forward to continuing to serve together in tackling the tremendous challenges confronting our great Nation.

I honor him and his wife Elaine for their service and sacrifices and ask for God's blessings on them both.

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, this is a day for all Kentuckians and Americans to celebrate the man I proudly call my best friend in the Senate.

Today we mark an historic occasion for the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the Senate, as my colleague, my friend, and my party's leader, MITCH McCONNELL, becomes the longest serving Senator in Kentucky history.

Back in 1984, when MITCH first won election to this Chamber by just over 5,000 out of over 1.2 million votes cast, some may have doubted that the Jefferson County judge executive and newly-elected Senator would go on to become the leader and statesman he is today. But some of us had little doubt.

It was easy to tell MITCH was special from the beginning. In 1984, he was the only Republican challenger in the country to defeat a Democratic incumbent in a Senate race. In Kentucky he was also the first Republican to win a statewide race since 1968.

MITCH went on to prove that his initial victory was not just luck. Some of my friends may not know what a prominent role MITCH has played in Kentucky's political history. He has helped to build the thriving two-party political system that Kentucky has today.

MITCH worked with the focused determination that is his trademark here in the Senate and aggressively recruited Republican candidates at every level throughout the State. He made his case to the people of Kentucky, explaining his philosophy and his mission.

As a Republican, he was certainly swimming upstream at first. But over time, the people responded.

Twenty-four years later, he remains as popular as ever back home. Last November, Kentuckians elected him to a record fifth term and awarded him nearly 1 million votes the most ever won by a Kentuckian in a statewide race.

And why shouldn't Kentucky continue to send MITCH McCONNELL to our Nation's Capital to fight for them? Look at all he has accomplished on their behalf.

No. 1 on the list is his effort to pass the tobacco buyout one of the most significant events in the agricultural history of Kentucky. I can't stress enough that the tobacco buyout, passed in 2004, has helped the livelihoods of tens of thousands of Kentucky tobacco farmers, their families, and the many towns

and communities in which they lived. The tobacco buyout will inject \$2.5 billion into Kentucky over 10 years to tobacco quota holders and growers, allowing them to transition to other crops, continue the farming way of life, and provide for their families. After many obstacles and years of frustration, I was proud to work closely with MITCH on this effort to sign the buyout into law. Many thought it couldn't be done. But we knew it could.

Then there are the millions of Kentuckians who have benefited from MITCH's work to strengthen higher education. I know firsthand his dedication to Kentucky's universities. He understands that by improving them, we not only help students but entire communities by developing jobs and building a better workforce.

During his time in the Senate, he has secured over \$320 million for research and infrastructure in Kentucky's universities. And I know he is not finished yet, as that remains one of his highest priorities.

All of us on this side of the aisle recognized MITCH's ability, and we have unanimously chosen him to be the Republican leader.

Leading the Senate is like herding cats. Senators are not the kind of people who are easily led. We are all used to leading ourselves.

It takes a special kind of man to lead all these class-president types, to balance the different personalities and issues that can come out of our conference. It takes vision and clarity to be able to define our principles and our mission, to codify them in a way that every Member can get on board, and to communicate them to our colleagues and the country. And it takes considerable wisdom to maneuver past the many legislative obstacles and parliamentary land mines that lay in wait in the Senate. MITCH McCONNELL is the right man for the job, and I am proud of him as he continues to lead our party in the Senate.

And Kentucky is proud of him, too, as only the second Kentuckian in history and the first in over half a century to become a Senate floor leader. In that role, he is able to do even more for Kentucky.

MITCH has graced this Senate with his leadership, commitment to principle, and his trademark determination for 24 years now 8,775 days, to be exact. He is now Kentucky's longest serving Senator.

On a personal note, I want to say that I couldn't ask for a better partner in my work to improve our State. Mary and I will always be thankful for his friendship and that of his wife, our great Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao.

Kentuckians could not have a better Senator fighting on their behalf. Our State is lucky to have him, and so is this Senate. I congratulate him on reaching this very significant milestone.

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues in celebrating this

remarkable achievement of our dear friend, the senior Senator from Kentucky and the minority leader of the Senate, Senator McCONNELL. And I apologize that I wasn't able to join the rest of my colleagues in their tribute earlier.

Twenty-four years is a long time in politics and in the case of my friend from Kentucky, it is historic.

But as someone who sits at the desk his father did before him—who treasures this institution—I know there is a difference between the length of our service and the quality of our service. And let there be no doubt that throughout his two-and-a-half decades here, Senator McCONNELL has tirelessly dedicated himself to the latter.

My friend and I may not agree on everything. But we both realize the extraordinary privilege and opportunity this is.

When this institution works, it works because of people like MITCH McCONNELL.

Having served with him for the past 24 years and during our time at the Rules Committee, I had the privilege of seeing my colleague's remarkable talent very closely.

Everyone in this Chamber knows how difficult the moment was after the Presidential election in 2000. The country was terribly divided along partisan lines and feelings in this institution were raw.

As chair and ranking member of Rules, the responsibility fell to Senator McCONNELL and me to count the electoral votes—typically a ceremonial duty but one fraught with tension in the wake of the closest Presidential election in American history.

We would soon oversee together President Bush's first inaugural as well.

That we were able to get back to business in such short order was a tribute to MITCH McCONNELL's temperament and commitment to this institution.

And there was some very important business to be done—not the least of which was reforming our nation's voting laws to ensure there wouldn't be a repeat of Florida ever again. Together, and over a series of months, he and I wrote the Helping America Vote Act.

It was a difficult, delicate process—but the hard work paid off.

Civil rights hero JOHN LEWIS called HAVA the most important voting rights law since the Voting Rights Act passed in 1965. In part because of Senator McCONNELL's commitment to working together—to working through difficult issues instead of setting them aside—today Americans have more confidence in their right to vote privately and independently.

We also managed the McCain-Feingold bill to reform our campaign finance laws on the floor of the Senate—another challenge that took considerable effort on the part of Democrats and Republicans to work together. To set aside those differences and focus on what was at stake.

Senator McCONNELL did not support the McCain-Feingold bill in the end. But he was passionate about there being a fair process.

As another Kentucky son once said, Justice Louis Brandeis, "We are not won by arguments that we can analyze, but by tone and temper—by the manner, which is the man himself."

To me, that is MITCH McCONNELL—a conservative to the marrow but someone who has never forgotten why we come here:

To make a difference.

So I congratulate my colleague and his family for reaching this remarkable milestone. May you continue to expand on it for many years to come. Thank you.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CARDIN). Morning business is closed.

DESIGNATING CERTAIN LAND COMPONENTS OF THE NATIONAL WILDERNESS PRESERVATION SYSTEM—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume the motion to proceed to S. 22, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 22) to designate certain land as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System, to authorize certain programs and activities in the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 10 minutes. I have conferred with the Senator from Oklahoma, Mr. COBURN, who was scheduled to speak first. That is satisfactory with him. I further ask unanimous consent that Senator COBURN be recognized at the conclusion of my remarks.

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

The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

REPORT ON FOREIGN TRAVEL

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to speak briefly about foreign travel which I undertook over the past recess, focusing principally on the Mideast and on Europe.

My group arrived in Jerusalem on December 26, late in the evening on Friday. The next day, the hostilities arose in Gaza. I had an occasion to discuss this matter with a number of officials in Israel and also with Prime Minister Fayyad of the Palestinian Authority.

As is well known from the news reports, the Israeli action was taken in response to shelling by Hamas on Israel over a protracted period of time. Israel's action was legal under international law, Article 51 of the United

Nations charter which expressly recognizes the right of self-defense under circumstances where a nation is attacked. And that was the factual matter there. In speaking to Israeli President Peres and Israeli Prime Minister Olmert, the point was made that Israel was taking this action only as a last resort to protect Israeli citizens.

It is highly significant that the Palestinian Authority, which has had its differences with Hamas, has backed the Israeli position. We had a discussion with Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Fayyad, who said that the Palestinian Authority was convinced that Israel had acted properly and that the Palestinian Authority would do what it could to maintain quiet within the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction in the face of any demonstrations which might occur.

It is worth noting that Egypt has backed the Israeli action, noting the aggressive stand taken by Hamas, and Saudi Arabia, too, has noted Hamas's inappropriate conduct.

We visited in Vienna with Ambassador Schulte and discussed at some length the International Atomic Energy Agency efforts to conduct inspections on what is going on in Iran with respect to any efforts by Iran to create a nuclear weapon.

A year ago, I had an opportunity to meet with IAEA Director Mohamed ElBaradei. He was out of town when we were there. I had a conversation with him by telephone on the issue of the efforts by the IAEA to conduct the inspections and that at the moment Iran is not cooperating and, further, international action needs to be taken to be sure Iran does meet its obligations under international agreements and that there are adequate safeguards to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

When we were in Syria, Iran's activities on that subject were discussed with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad. On the Iranian subject, President Asad urged that action be taken to try to get the inspections, and that would be a more productive line than challenging whatever rights Iran had asserted.

In our discussions with President Asad, the subject of a potential Israel-Syria peace treaty was discussed. The Syrians have made it plain that they are interested in a return of the Golan Heights. Only Israel can decide for itself whether it is willing to give up the Golan with respect to whatever strategic advantage the Golan may have. Obviously, it is a different world strategically today than it was in 1967 when Israel captured the Golan Heights.

It is my view that there could be substantial advantages for Israel in terms of Syrian concessions in a number of directions to leave Lebanon as a sovereign nation without efforts to destabilize Lebanon but withdrawing any Syrian support from Hezbollah and also from Hamas. When we discussed with

President Asad the issue of Hezbollah and Hamas, he said if the Palestinian issue could be resolved, those other matters would fall into place.

There is also the potential advantage of trying to move Syria away from the influence of Iran. That is not an easy matter. But if there were to be an Israeli-Syrian peace treaty—and I think that can happen only with the participation of the United States—the prospect would be present of improving that situation of trying to separate Syria from Iran.

In Brussels, we had a meeting with General Craddock, who is the NATO commander there. We discussed a variety of subjects, as described in a more extensive report that I will ask to have printed in the RECORD.

With respect to our discussions with General Craddock, the key point was the issue of what is going on in Afghanistan. General Craddock made the point that there cannot be a military victory in Afghanistan but the military can be successful in securing the situation, that there will have to be improvements in the Afghanistan Government in dealing with the people of Afghanistan. General Craddock commented that he thought it would be a protracted period of time where we would have to have substantial NATO forces, in addition to those provided by the United States, to find a resolution of the issues in Afghanistan.

I was accompanied on my trip by my legislative director, Chris Bradish, my military escort, Phil Skuta, and by Dr. Ronald Smith, all of whom did an excellent job. A very comprehensive trip report has been prepared by Mr. Bradish. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD, as if stated in full on the floor, the trip report.

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

REPORT ON FOREIGN TRAVEL

Mr. President, as is my custom, when I return from foreign travel, I file a report with the Senate.

From December 25, 2008 to January 5, 2009, I traveled to the United Kingdom, Israel, Syria, Austria, Belgium, Norway, and Iceland. I was accompanied by my wife, Joan, my Legislative Director, Chris Bradish, my military escort, Phil Skuta, Colonel, USMC, and Dr. Ronald Smith, Captain, USN.

ISRAEL

I departed the United States on December 25th and made a brief stop in London en route to Israel. We arrived in Israel on the evening of December 26th. This was my twenty-sixth visit to Israel since joining the Senate in 1981. Almost exactly a year after my previous visit to Israel, the domestic political landscape had changed significantly. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert tendered his resignation on September 21, 2008, and general elections are set for February 10, 2009. One of the major questions being posed to the major parties is how best to approach the peace process.

A 6-month truce between Israel and Hamas ended on December 19, 2008. United Nations data showed that fewer rockets were fired at Israeli towns in the initial few months following the onset of the truce on June 19, 2008. The New York Times reported on December 19 that, "more than 300 rockets were