

and the rule of law. It almost seems that anyone who criticizes him is beyond the pale, is fake, is dishonest.

As the revelation about the Nixon case shows, there is still much we don't know about Judge Kavanaugh. The Senate and the American people deserve to know where Judge Kavanaugh stands on a host of issues. After all, the Supreme Court is a lifetime appointment with enormous power—the power to overrule the elected bodies of government.

Given that the hearing process for the Supreme Court has tended to be more of a public relations exercise for nominees rather than a legitimate examination of judicial philosophy, Judge Kavanaugh's papers might be the best and only way to judge what kind of a Justice he might be. My Republican friends understood this when it came to Justice Kagan, who had served in key positions in prior administrations, much like Judge Kavanaugh. They were then in the minority, as we are now, when Judge Kagan was nominated, but our Republican colleagues demanded the entire paper history of then-Solicitor General Kagan before moving forward with her nomination, and Democrats agreed.

In a joint letter to the director of the Clinton Library, the chairman and ranking member of the Judiciary Committee at the time—Senator LEAHY, the chairman, and Senator Jeff Sessions, now Attorney General, but then the ranking Republican on the committee—wrote that they expected “all records containing documents written by, edited by, prepared in whole or part by, under the supervision of, or at the direction of Elena Kagan, as well as documents referencing Elena Kagan by name, initials, or title, and documents received by or sent to Elena Kagan.”

A Democratic chairman and Republican Senator Sessions, the ranking member, asked for every single document of Elena Kagan's record. Why should such a standard apply to Justice Kagan but not to Judge Kavanaugh?

I have taken the liberty of editing the letter sent by Senators Sessions and LEAHY. It didn't take much work to make it directly applicable today. It is the same letter, same request, simply crossing out every time it mentions Kagan and putting in the name “Kavanaugh.” There was no change. It is the same standard.

I have already heard from my Republican colleagues, including Chairman GRASSLEY, that there is no reason to review Judge Kavanaugh's full record before proceeding with his nomination.

I have had enough of the two-facedness, the total hypocrisy on judges, where somehow our Republican colleagues say it is good one way when we have a Democratic President and the opposite should take effect when we have a Republican President. That is what they are doing with the records here first of Judge Kagan and now Judge Kavanaugh.

Well, I say to my Republican colleagues, what is good for Justice

Kagan—let's call it the Kagan standard—is good enough for Judge Kavanaugh—paraphrasing, of course, what is good for the goose is good for the gander.

The Senate's duty to advise and consent does not mean move as hastily as possible. For the benefit of this body, for the sake of consistency, and for the honor of this Chamber, I hope my Republican friends join Democrats in asking for and waiting for all the documents related to Judge Kavanaugh. The American people have a right to know what is there, and the Senate must have enough time to review the body of work before making an unalterable decision on a lifetime appointment to the Nation's highest Court.

TRUMP-PUTIN SUMMIT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on Russia, a week ago today, President Trump met with President Putin in Helsinki, and with the world watching, failed to show an ounce of strength in defense of American interests.

What followed was an embarrassing week of insincere walk backs and mixed messages, culminating on Friday in a bizarre invitation for President Putin to visit the White House this fall—something the President's own Director of National Intelligence, Mr. Coats, was not made aware of. It is not hyperbolic to say that last week may have been one of the worst weeks in American foreign policy in recent memory.

In the face of these stunning events, what have my Republican colleagues done to rein in the President? I am sad to report, virtually nothing. In the full week since the Helsinki summit, Republicans failed to take meaningful action to hold the President accountable for his foreign policy blunders in Finland. Republicans have offered words of rebuke, statements, disappointed tweets, but they have not backed up any of those words with the force of action.

I have seen my colleagues shrug their shoulders as if there weren't anything the U.S. Senate could do to check this President, even though they feel in their hearts, I know, that he needs checking. I mentioned several ways the Senate could grapple with and push back a bit on what President Trump has done: bring in his national security team and translator to testify before Congress, particularly so we can tell what happened in that 2 hours when Putin and Trump were alone; pass legislation to protect the special counsel and legislation to harden our election infrastructure because we risk Russia's interference again; implement sanctions against Russia; demand that Russia hand over the 12 Russians indicted for election interference and more.

If my Republican friends were serious about doing something to redirect our posture toward Russia, we should have seen some movement by now on one or more of these things, but we are stuck

in the mud. Even though there is bipartisan condemnation for the President's behavior last week, the Senate has remained virtually silent on the matter because Republicans here are unwilling, maybe afraid, to confront the President, even though they know what he did was so wrong.

At the end of last week, the Republican majority blocked a bipartisan resolution—a modest one from Senators Flake and Coons, one a Republican, one a Democrat—that sought to hold Russia accountable. It didn't have many teeth, but still the Republicans objected.

Are my Republican friends ever willing to push back against this President, not just in words but in deeds, or are they too afraid of the political consequences? Are they willing to put country over party at this crucial time? It seems not, at least so far.

I know many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle were deeply disturbed by the President's inexplicable behavior in Helsinki. I say to them, America needs you now. We need you to stand up, step up to the plate, and do something about it.

Frankly, if we don't do something real, President Trump—I know him—will conclude he doesn't need to change his behavior, and, as a result, Republicans will be complicit in enabling the President to continue down the disastrous course he has set.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session for the consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert L. Wilkie, of North Carolina, to be Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I started my morning in Kansas City speaking to 4,000 veterans attending the Veterans of Foreign Wars 119th National Convention held in Kansas City.

My speech was a message to those Americans whom I hold in highest regard, our Nation's veterans, and especially those veterans who are helping other veterans. I wanted them to know, when they signed up to serve our country, they did not do so in support of any political party. Those who serve our Nation, and particularly those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, did not answer the call to support Republicans or Democrats, but they answered for a higher calling.

Speaking to thousands of veterans this morning and being in a room filled with the characteristics that make this country so great—duty, honor, loyalty, respect—should remind us here in Washington, DC, that we must work together to do everything possible to ensure that our Nation's nearly 20 million veterans receive the best our Nation has to offer. Putting veterans first and setting aside differences has led to major policy changes and vital veterans legislation such as the John McCain VA MISSION Act to reform the VA's healthcare system.

Of course, a large part of the task to ensure veterans get the best our Nation has to offer falls to the Department of Veterans Affairs. I want our veterans to receive the best care, the best attention possible from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In just a few minutes, the Senate will vote on the confirmation of Mr. Robert Wilkie to be the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. I am confident Mr. Wilkie is focused on putting veterans first, changing the VA culture of any complacency—ridding it of any complacency—and is ready to lead the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Of course, Mr. Wilkie has numerous monumental tasks ahead of him. The Department of Veterans Affairs is a massive bureaucracy that has had a number of challenges in the past, and he will be charged with successfully implementing the John McCain VA MISSION Act.

The VA MISSION Act, if implemented correctly, will be transformative for the Department and will make sure the VA continues to serve veterans for generations to come. I look forward to working with Mr. Wilkie to accomplish that goal, and I appreciate the interest the Trump administration has had on implementation of the VA MISSION Act.

I judge whether the VA is working for veterans by what we all call casework, which is when veterans seek help from me and my staff because they can't break down the barriers or navigate the VA's penchant to tell them no. Right now, we have about 80 open veterans' cases and a steady stream of about 30 cases coming from Kansas veterans each month. I intend to be an active participant, working with the VA as they work to implement the VA MISSION Act. I intend to be a constructive participant in the process for making the VA better for Kansas veterans and American veterans.

Those in our communities can help as well, not just those in the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is what we all do as citizens, educators, and business men and women. One of the first acts is developing access standards, and folks can provide their feedback until July 30. So let us hear from the VFW and other VSOs. Let us hear from veterans. Either the VA or my office can direct you to the Federal Register site to make those comments known.

I am pleased we are taking the final step needed in the Senate tonight to

provide the leadership to confirm Mr. Robert Wilkie to be the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today this Chamber will take an important step to ensure that we have leadership in the Department of Veterans Affairs to oversee the implementation of historic reforms that we passed in May to improve the VA's healthcare delivery system and provide veterans with more choices and fewer barriers to care.

We will vote on the nomination of Robert Wilkie to serve as Secretary of the VA. Having served our Nation in uniform, as well as experiencing military life as the son of a wounded combat soldier, Robert Wilkie's extensive career in a wide range of defense and veterans issues makes him uniquely qualified to serve as the next Secretary of the VA. He clearly understands the complexities associated with serving our Nation and the importance of taking care of veterans.

I am grateful for Robert Wilkie's willingness to serve as the next Secretary of the VA. I urge my colleagues to follow the example of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, which overwhelmingly advanced his nomination to the Senate in a bipartisan way. Having served as Acting Secretary of the VA, Robert Wilkie is well aware of the challenges facing the Department.

Accepting responsibility to oversee the implementation of reforms passed by Congress, including the VA MISSION Act, to update its medical records system, to expand support for our women veterans, and to reduce the disability claims backlog, are just a few of those issues that he will need to tackle.

To accomplish all of this, he will have to change the culture at the VA. Serving as the Secretary of the VA is a huge undertaking, but one that he has committed to me that he wholeheartedly accepts. The Senate VA Committee and my office are ready and willing to help him and the VA succeed in their mission.

Congress has given the VA the tools to provide our veterans with quality care and to improve the benefits they have earned. Now the Department needs his leadership to implement and to carry out these changes. Under the leadership of future Secretary Wilkie, the VA can reestablish a nonpartisan approach to serving veterans.

Our veterans must be our top priority. I am confident that Robert Wilkie will provide the leadership the VA needs to better serve our veterans.

I yield back.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote to confirm Robert Wilkie, President Trump's outstanding choice to serve as the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The job is an incredibly important one. As Secretary, Mr. Wilkie will be tasked with fulfilling our Nation's commitments to veterans and their families, expanding their access to care, and improving accountability at the VA.

Millions of American veterans rely on the VA—day in and day out—for healthcare, employment resources, counseling, and a host of other services they need and have certainly earned.

It is fortunate, then, that Mr. Wilkie's impressive career of public service demonstrates he is well prepared to advance the agency's vital missions.

Robert Wilkie grew up the son of an Army artillery officer. He carried on the tradition of service as an officer in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. In addition to uniformed service, Mr. Wilkie has amassed more than two decades of experience as a civil servant. He has served at the Department of Defense, at the National Security Council, and here on Capitol Hill.

Throughout the years, he has built a reputation as a thoughtful analyst and a skilled manager. Both these skills will serve him well at the helm of an agency that employs nearly 400,000 people to meet the needs of millions more.

I know I speak for so many of my colleagues when I say that the Senate looks forward to working closely with the next Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Already in 2018, guided by the leadership of Chairman ISAKSON, this body has taken decisive action to better fulfill our Nation's promises to veterans and their families.

In May, the Senate voted, by a wide bipartisan margin, to pass the VA MISSION Act, which was designed to ensure that the services on which our Nation's heroes rely are flexible and accessible enough to meet their needs.

The omnibus spending measure passed earlier this year included a record level of support for VA programs.

In Robert Wilkie, the President has chosen a partner with whom this body can work side by side to continue advancing the interests of our Nation's veterans, including more than 300,000 in my home State of Kentucky.

I look forward to doing just that. I urge each of my colleagues to join me in voting today to confirm this qualified nominee.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I am proud to speak today on behalf of my friend and colleague Robert Wilkie, the nominee to be VA Secretary.

I have had the honor of working with Robert for 3 years. Sometimes, he worked for me, and other times, I worked for him. His combination of knowledge, humor, humility, and heart has endeared him to my staff and to

scores of North Carolina constituents, including many servicemembers and veterans.

Robert was born in Frankfurt, West Germany, the son of an Army artillery officer. He literally grew up on Fort Bragg, and he lived most of his early life in the Fort Bragg-Fayetteville area of North Carolina.

Robert is now an intelligence officer in the U.S. Air Force Reserve.

Previously, he served in the Atlantic Intelligence Command and Joint Forces Intelligence Command and the U.S. Navy.

Robert has also pursued a distinguished career in public service on the civilian side, both in the halls of the Pentagon and of Congress. Robert has served as a trusted adviser to some of our Nation's most distinguished public servants, including Robert Gates, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and Jim Mattis.

As a congressional staffer, Robert developed excellent working relationships with committee staff, on both sides of the aisle. He is universally recognized as a team player and mentor, traits of any outstanding leader.

Frankly, given his depth of experience, I was pleasantly surprised and very proud to have Robert accept a position with a 6-month-old freshman Senator, but it was clear to me from the start that Robert was destined to serve our Nation at a higher level.

Last year, Robert received that call from the administration when he was nominated to be Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. Robert demonstrated his extraordinary skills in a short period of time, so it was no surprise to me that the administration identified him as a perfect fit to be Secretary of the VA.

When he was appointed in the acting role as VA Secretary, he quickly worked to improve morale at the VA, earning strong reviews and trust from VSOs, members of Congress, and VA staff. He also moved decisively to execute the electronic health record project, which we all know is a critical part of the VA transformation initiative.

Robert has all of the education and professional experience required of a Secretary of the VA, but perhaps what makes Robert best suited to the job is his lifelong experience as an Army brat and the personal experience as the son of a gravely wounded soldier.

He has literally lived the experience, and I know that Robert will bring his professional experience and a personal insight and intensity to the role that will serve our veterans well.

Robert has been confirmed unanimously by the Senate on two separate occasions, most recently in November 2017, by my colleagues in this current 115th Congress. Since the VA was elevated to a Cabinet-level department in 1988, there have been nine Secretaries of Veterans Affairs; Robert Wilkie will soon be the 10th.

No nominee to be VA Secretary has ever received a single recorded no vote on the Senate floor.

I look forward to supporting his confirmation, and I would encourage all of my colleagues to do the same. Put politics aside and vote in favor of this honorable and eminently qualified man to serve all of our Nations' veterans.

Thank you.

Mr. BOOZMAN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I rise today to announce that I think Robert Wilkie is the right man for the job to be VA Secretary. Today, we are going to fulfill our constitutional responsibility to provide advice and consent on the President's nominee. This is a responsibility that I take very seriously, especially in my role as ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

In our committee, Chairman ISAKSON and I have overseen the screening of the confirmation of 12 nominees to serve veterans. I am proud to say that we confirmed them without dragging our feet.

Recently, we had Mr. Robert Wilkie before the committee for his confirmation hearing. Members of our committee asked him tough questions about his vision for the VA. We asked him about his plan to bring much needed stability to the Nation's largest healthcare system. Following the important exchanges during that hearing, Members sent more tough questions to the nominee for his response. In the days since his nomination, Mr. Wilkie has sat down with Members to respond to their questions and concerns one-on-one.

By voting to confirm Mr. Wilkie today, I believe we are providing stronger leadership for America's veterans. With this vote, we are fulfilling our obligation to them.

We are doing our job, but our job just doesn't stop today. As Members of this body, we must hold Mr. Wilkie accountable to the commitments he has made through his confirmation process.

There are some critically important issues to be addressed within the VA. There are workforce shortages, whether in rural America or urban America. We need more doctors and nurses and more psychiatrists and psychologists within the VA. This is critically important if he is going to oversee a successful VA. We need to have the VA personnel. We need to have it manned appropriately to meet the challenges that are out there after being at war for 17 years and veterans from previous eras getting older.

Today, unlike ever before, we have political forces at play inside the VA. This is very unfortunate because, quite

frankly, I believe that good employees are being forced out, not because of the job they are doing but because of their views. When Mr. Wilkie becomes Secretary, he is going to have to make sure that stops. It is critically important that we keep the employees that we have who are good employees and move the VA forward so it can do the job that it is meant to do.

He also has some challenges to address in rural America. The community-based outpatient clinics we have there need to be staffed up. We need to make sure that the VA has what it needs to meet the needs of the veterans in rural America, and, by the way, with the passage of the MISSION Act, we need to make sure that veterans aren't run around once that act gets fully implemented and they need community care and the VA can't provide that care.

He needs to make sure the disability appeals process continues to move forward and that the backlog is whittled down. He needs to make sure that the accountability bill is implemented as Congress intended and that the whistleblower protection in the bill lives up to what it means. He also needs to implement the "Forever GI bill" in a way that makes sense for our veterans. Last and certainly not least, he needs to make sure the VA MISSION Act is implemented in a way in which a veteran can make the decision as to how he gets his or her healthcare.

Veterans need a leader who will build bridges and find solutions to the issues that face our veterans, not who will tear down the Department to meet a political agenda. Veterans need a leader who will not shy away from those challenges that face the VA. We need someone who is going to tackle the challenges like workforce shortages, like access to mental healthcare, and like barriers, particularly in rural America, for women veterans. I believe that Mr. Wilkie is the right fit for that job.

Right now, the VA does not have a confirmed Secretary who is focused on the larger mission of serving these veterans, of implementing the reforms, and of improving VA care and benefits. Instead, we have had temporary political appointees in charge who have been more interested in picking political fights with people who have not been their enemies. I believe we have lost sight of the VA's mission. It will be up to Mr. Wilkie to right that ship.

That is why I am so hopeful that this evening, we can get Mr. Wilkie confirmed so that he can get on the job as soon as possible. Veterans are depending on him, and they are depending on us to make sure he gets to work. Once he gets to work, I guarantee that the chairman of the VA Committee and I, as ranking member, and all of the members of the Senate's Veterans' Affairs Committee will make sure that he does the job and fulfills the promises we have made to our veterans.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from Montana, Mr. TESTER, for his remarks. I thank him more so for his hard work, as ranking member, over the last 2 years with me, as chairman, and for bringing us to the point at which we are today. Jon and I are very excited because we know that Robert Wilkie is the real deal. We know the things that we have gone through with some of the previous appointees and with some of the problems at the VA now have a chance to be overridden and solved and that we will step forward in a new day for the VA.

We no longer want somebody who is going to make excuses for the VA. We want somebody who is going to make a difference at the VA. Robert Wilkie understands the needs of our veterans in rural areas. He understands their needs in large urban cities. He understands the threat of suicide and the need to have mental health care accessible and available to our veterans at all times. He knows all of the things we need to do. He also knows we have given him a quiver of arrows that he can use as he hunts through the VA to root out the bad players and lift the big players.

The VA MISSION Act, as JON TESTER just mentioned, is absolutely rule No. 1. The implementation of that change gives our veterans the choice, our rural veterans the access, our urban veterans the accountability, and the VA the chance to maximize the delivery of healthcare services to our veterans at a cost that, over time, will be less than if the VA had done it all by itself.

The VA is a tremendous organization. It is the state of the art in many things—in ophthalmology, for example, and in treating a lot of the signature wounds that we have today from the war—PTSD and all of those. Our VA does a phenomenal job with all of those. Yet there are a lot of healthcare services that are routine for which veterans shouldn't have to wait 3, 4, and 5 months but that they ought to be able to get in a reasonably accessible period of time. They ought to be able to get services closest to home, where they are, and be able to get them from those who can deliver the services to them when they need them. The VA MISSION Act lets that happen.

I am going to say a few things tonight in my remarks on the early warnings with regard to the VA MISSION Act—that it is costing a lot of money because they are going to see some requests come in for money. Yes, it is going to take us a little while to get over the bubble with the initial implementation, but when we do, we are going to minimize the cost and give greater service to the veterans and, over time, reduce the cost to our veterans.

Every time we don't require the VA to build another hospital or another clinic, we are lowering the cost of our real estate and uplifting the opportunity for us to spend more money on services. Every time we have doctors in hospitals who treat veterans who want

to participate in the VA MISSION Act and the Veterans Choice Program, they will not have to add all of the other costs of infrastructure, and our veterans will get better choice, better service, better medical care, and better time.

This is an opportunity to make the change of a lifetime. We are going to make the VA something it has always wanted to be and give the veterans something they always thought they had—the best possible care at the most affordable price to the taxpayer. We will deliver a difference for our veterans and their families.

I am proud of what the committee did 2 weeks ago when it passed the VA MISSION Act and when it brought about caregivers' legislation for those family members so that they may take care of loved ones from the Vietnam war era. We are going to have bills coming up that have to do with the Navy and other things like that in the year ahead. We have a lot of things we are going to do.

I want us to stop, here and now, dragging out old stories about the VA and talking about what the VA isn't and, instead, talk about what it is. I want to give a specific example. The press needs to stop giving a 3-, 4-, 5-year IG's report and reporting it as today's news. Jon and I have spent more time in responding to reports about the IG or someone else—I am just picking on the IG—and about failures within the VA when, in fact, it turns out that they are from a study from 2006 when we finally get the report. They make a big deal out of it as if it were yesterday.

Most of the issues from the Veterans Administration's major stories—I didn't say "all," and it never will be all—are being met and addressed faster than ever before. We have to report the good news as well as the tough news. I will stand there and respond to the tough news all day long, but I hate it when I have to call my own press conference to talk about what is really going on at the VA that is really good.

It is absolutely essential that we be in partnership with the media—the VA itself, the VA's employees, its service providers, and all of us in our roles in Congress as committee chairs, in leadership. It is essential that all of us join in and put our arms together and move forward in order to have a stronger, more productive, more responsible VA.

I mentioned the VA MISSION Act and accountability. We have finally given the VA the ability to hold its employees accountable, which we have been meaning to do for a long, long time, and it is making a difference. We have the Whistleblower Protection Act, which gives whistleblowers the chance to make reports for things that they see, know, and do that are difficult and should be corrected. We have given them some degree of reasonable protection so that they are not run over instead. That is something that is important to do.

We have talked about accountability. We have talked about all kinds of

things. We will talk about one last thing, and that is rural America.

Certainly, with JON, I have gained a greater impression than I have before of the problems that rural America faces. Georgia has a large rural population, but, quite frankly, Georgia is a big State, and Atlanta is a big city. When you go outside Atlanta, you still have Savannah, Augusta, and a lot of places that are much bigger than the biggest city in Montana. We owe those veterans who are more distant from the services we provide, because of where they live, the opportunity to get the services faster and quicker. We are going to do that with the VA MISSION Act. I appreciate JON's leadership in doing that as it has made a real difference.

What I have tried to do with the hotlines on mental health for the veterans who call in—whose lives are in danger or who are in danger of taking their own lives or who need help or counseling then and now—is to make sure they are no longer getting hung up on, to make sure they are no longer getting referred to other operators, to make sure they are no longer getting called back tomorrow after leaving voice mails. It is to make sure they are getting action right here and right now—today. We owe it to our veterans whose lives are at risk today—the same thing they do every day when they serve us in uniform and their lives are at risk every day overseas.

We have a chance to do a wonderful thing, and that is to keep our promise. We have to change and deliver quality healthcare to our veterans and deliver a better response to our veterans than they have ever had before. We have the chance to fix the problems that we have had and to look to the future for new solutions to other problems that will face us. We owe our veterans no less than the best Secretary in Robert Wilkie, and we have him in Robert Wilkie.

I told Robert: You have no excuses. I have heard all of the excuses I ever want to hear about this. We know what we have to do, and we know when we need to do it. It is now. We have to know how to do it, and it is with you as the Secretary of the VA.

I commend him to my fellow Members of the U.S. Senate.

I thank Chairman ROE, from the House of Representatives, and for the hard work that they have done in bringing this together with JON and I and seeing to it we have a great Secretary.

We are going to lock arms and be in lockstep next year to make the VA perform even better than it has before. We are here to make sure that the VA has no excuses on the results, that it gets the backing it needs from us, that those veterans who have served us get the healthcare they need, and that the veterans who join us today to defend us in the future will have it there when they retire.

I urge Senators to vote for Secretary Robert Wilkie to be Secretary of the

VA, our 10th most recent VA appointee, and to give him a unanimous vote today, which is the kind of support he needs to move forward in the 21st century.

God bless all for being here today. I thank the Senators for their votes. I thank Senator TESTER for his support as ranking member, and I thank the Senator from Kansas for his support throughout the year.

I yield here to the Senator from North Carolina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I thank the chair for the kind words about the nominee, Robert Wilkie, for the Veterans Health Administration.

I am here to proudly discuss his record. Actually, until about 6 months ago, he was the military affairs adviser in my office and was my adviser on the VA. He has done an extraordinary job.

He is the child of a gravely wounded veteran from the Vietnam war. He grew up on Fort Bragg. He is from Fayetteville, NC. He has done an extraordinary job in serving our office, in mentoring my staff, and in working for Senate leaders and leaders in the White House—Secretary Gates, Secretary Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, and now General Mattis.

Robert Wilkie is going to do an extraordinary job because he understands what it is like to be the son of a veteran and to be a member of the armed services himself. He serves in the Air Force to this day. He previously served in the Navy. He has attended the U.S. Army War College. He has a law degree and a keen understanding of how this governing body works. He also has great relationships with people across the political spectrum. He has worked very closely in committee work with the committee staff. He just has an extraordinary reputation. He has an extraordinary sense of history. He has a great dedication to our veterans, and he understands the intrinsic link between Active Duty and reservists and, ultimately, with veterans.

I believe that he is going to go in and move forward with the transformation and do great things for our veterans who need the help today. He will do an even more outstanding job of understanding how we can better prepare the men and women who are serving today to go into veteran status—to help them find jobs, to provide them with healthcare, to make sure they get the most out of their veterans' benefits. I know that Robert Wilkie will do an extraordinary job.

I appreciate Chairman ISAKSON's leadership on the committee. I think, with a strong Secretary like Robert Wilkie in Veterans Affairs, we will finally start making progress in repaying the debt that we can never fully repay to the men and women in uniform. I strongly support this vote, and I look forward to having a very strong confirmation vote this afternoon.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time is yielded back.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Wilkie nomination?

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. BURR), the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN), is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). Are there any other Senators in the chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 86, nays 9, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 163 Ex.]

YEAS—86

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander | Graham | Paul |
| Baldwin | Grassley | Perdue |
| Barrasso | Hassan | Peters |
| Bennet | Hatch | Portman |
| Blumenthal | Heinrich | Reed |
| Blunt | Heitkamp | Risch |
| Boozman | Heller | Roberts |
| Cantwell | Hirono | Rounds |
| Capito | Hoeven | Rubio |
| Cardin | Hyde-Smith | Sasse |
| Carper | Inhofe | Schatz |
| Casey | Isakson | Schumer |
| Cassidy | Johnson | Scott |
| Collins | Jones | Shaheen |
| Coons | Kaine | Shelby |
| Cornyn | King | Smith |
| Cortez Masto | Klobuchar | Stabenow |
| Cotton | Lankford | Sullivan |
| Crapo | Leahy | Tester |
| Cruz | Lee | Thune |
| Daines | Manchin | Tillis |
| Donnelly | McCaskill | Toomey |
| Duckworth | McConnell | Udall |
| Durbin | Menendez | Van Hollen |
| Enzi | Moran | Warner |
| Ernst | Murkowski | Whitehouse |
| Fischer | Murphy | Wicker |
| Flake | Murray | Young |
| Gardner | Nelson | |

NAYS—9

| | | |
|------------|---------|---------|
| Booker | Harris | Sanders |
| Feinstein | Markey | Warren |
| Gillibrand | Merkley | Wyden |

NOT VOTING—5

| | | |
|-------|---------|--------|
| Brown | Corker | Mccain |
| Burr | Kennedy | |

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, FINANCIAL SERVICES, AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2019

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session and proceed to the consideration of H.R. 6147, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6147) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that for the purpose of rule XVI in relation to the substitute amendment No. 3399, division A of H.R. 6147 serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division A of the amendment; that division B of H.R. 6147 serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division B of the amendment; that H.R. 5961, as reported by the House Appropriations Committee, serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division C of the amendment; and that H.R. 6072, as reported by the House Appropriations Committee, serve as the basis for defense of germaneness for division D of the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 3399

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.)

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I now call up the substitute amendment No. 3399.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alabama [Mr. SHELBY] proposes an amendment numbered 3399.

Mr. SHELBY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under "Text of Amendments.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

AMENDMENT NO. 3400 TO AMENDMENT NO. 3399

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 3400.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Alaska [Ms. MURKOWSKI] proposes an amendment numbered 3400 to amendment No. 3399.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

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

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To make a technical correction)

On page 95, line 6, strike "\$5,000,000" and insert "\$5,250,000".