

change in this administration, from the President down. Among Presidential appointees, there still is significant danger in speaking truth to power.

The President, Senate, and the American people are putting a great deal on Dr. Gates' shoulders. I am voting for him with the hope that he can make us proud.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise to voice my strong support for the nomination of Dr. Robert M. Gates to be the Nation's 22nd Secretary of Defense. His intelligence, candor, and many years of national security experience make him an excellent choice to lead the Pentagon and our Nation's troops during this critical time in war on terror.

Dr. Gates wore his country's uniform as a U.S. Air Force officer; his service includes time spent with the Strategic Air Command, the prestigious unit once charged with protecting America from a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union. Dr. Gates's career includes two decades with the CIA, where he started as an entry-level employee and rose to the top position. And he spent 9 years at the National Security Council. Throughout his Government service, he has advised six Presidents.

Having previously served as Deputy Director of Central Intelligence from 1986 to 1989, Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Adviser from 1989 to 1991, and Director of Central Intelligence from 1991 to 1993, Dr. Gates is one of the most qualified national-security specialists in the country.

As DCI he led over 100,000 employees and managed the Agency at a critical juncture at the end of the Cold War. And he has spent the last 13 years outside of government, giving him both a keen understanding of best business practices and a fresh perspective to tackle America's security challenges.

Dr. Gates has a proven record of bipartisan cooperation, demonstrated most recently by his tenure with the Iraq Study Group. As a member of that group, he has traveled to Iraq, met Iraqi leaders, and talked to our military commanders on the ground. He is ready to hit the ground running and lead the Pentagon from the day he is confirmed.

Five years into the war on terror, America has made great progress. But much hard work still lies ahead, as we continue to defend Americans here at home while fighting abroad the terrorists who would do us harm. The position of Secretary of Defense is more important than ever, and I believe the President has made an outstanding choice.

Dr. Gates has the wisdom and the ability to succeed. He will be a strong leader for the Pentagon and our brave men and women in uniform. I urge my colleagues to support his nomination, and I will wholeheartedly vote for his confirmation.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I intend to support the nomination of Dr. Robert

Gates as the new Secretary of Defense. I believe he will provide the Department of Defense, and the President's senior team, the new perspective and fresh ideas so desperately needed. He is a distinguished and seasoned public servant, and his long experience will serve him well in what will be a challenging post.

I want to thank Senators WARNER and LEVIN for making sure Dr. Gates received an expeditious and thorough hearing. With our Nation at war, we could not afford to let his confirmation drag.

I am hopeful that, when confirmed, Dr. Gates will serve as an agent of change in the administration—most importantly, on Iraq.

Yesterday, when asked if we are winning in Iraq, Dr. Gates said "no." Today, the Iraq Study Group said the situation in Iraq is "grave and deteriorating."

The Iraq Study Group has done a tremendous and historic service to the American people and to the troops serving in harm's way in Iraq. Their report underscores the message the American people sent one month ago: there must be change in Iraq, and there is no time to lose. It is time for the Iraqis to build and secure their nation, and it is time for American combat troops to be redeployed. Each day the situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. Time is not on our side.

This assessment rings particularly true today, as we learned that 10 U.S. troops were killed in fighting across Iraq, bringing the level of U.S. deaths to 27 in only the first 6 days of December. On average, almost three U.S. troops are killed each day. We do not have time for finger-pointing and pontificating from politicians—it is time for action and leadership.

Most experts agree that Iraq is now embroiled in a civil war, and our troops are caught in the middle. Policing a civil war between Shia and Sunni is not something for which our country or our military consented. We must begin to transition our mission in Iraq, reduce our combat footprint, and begin to extricate our troops from the middle of this sectarian strife. In short, we need more than a change in personality at the Defense Department, we need a change in policy. I urge the President to reach out to Congress and work with us to change course.

If the administration reaches out in a meaningful way, it will find Congress ready and willing to work as a partner. The Senate will do its part next year and conduct strong oversight to ensure the President carries out an effective change in policy. Our troops in Iraq, including hundreds of Nevadans, have sacrificed so much. It is time for President Bush to reward their effort by bringing the country together around a new way forward.

Once Dr. Gates is confirmed, I look forward to the Senate working with him and the President on this change of course in Iraq.

In addition, I look forward to working with Dr. Gates to change course on the other key challenges we face. Dr. Gates must come to Congress with a solid plan for addressing the readiness of our military which is under strain and at risk because of the administration's Iraq strategy.

Dr. Gates must help the administration develop an effective approach for curbing Iran and North Korea's nuclear ambitions. And Dr. Gates must spearhead a new effort to ensure a successful outcome for Afghanistan, as part of a broader fresh look at our strategy for the war on terror, the hunt for Usama bin Laden, and the struggle to empower moderates and combat violent extremists. These are serious issues that deserve to be addressed properly.

Hopefully, Dr. Gates can operate with the same level of candor and realism as Secretary of Defense as he has during his nomination process. The stakes for our Nation are high, and his task is a great one, but today, he has our support and a commitment to work together to solve this Nation's national security challenges.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I see no other Senators seeking recognition, so I think we may as well—the standing order is the vote begins at 5 o'clock?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. That is correct.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

Is all time yielded back?

Without objection, all time is yielded back.

Mr. WARNER. I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Robert M. Gates, of Texas, to be Secretary of Defense?

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. The following Senator was necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BAYH) and the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN) are necessarily absent.

I further announce that if present and voting, the Senator from Delaware (Mr. BIDEN) would vote "yea."

The result was announced—yeas 95, nays 2, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 272 Ex.]

YEAS—95

Akaka	Bingaman	Byrd
Alexander	Bond	Cantwell
Allard	Boxer	Carper
Allen	Brownback	Chafee
Baucus	Burns	Chambliss
Bennett	Burr	Clinton