

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, the coronavirus has already spread to 30 countries, including South Korea, Italy, Iran, and 53 confirmed cases here in the United States. Officials at the World Health Organization are now warning world governments to begin preparing for a pandemic—a pandemic.

Here in the United States, the Trump administration has been caught flat-footed. The administration has no plan to deal with the coronavirus—no plan—and seemingly no urgency to develop one. Even now, after the virus has already become a worldwide health crisis, with rapidly growing economic risks, the Trump administration is scrambling to respond. We have a crisis, and the Trump administration is trying to build an airplane while already in midflight. The harsh fact of the matter is, the Trump administration has shown towering and dangerous incompetence when it comes to the coronavirus.

Coronavirus testing kits have not been widely distributed to our hospitals and public health labs. Those without these kits must send samples all the way to Atlanta rather than testing them on site, wasting precious time as the virus spreads.

The administration has eliminated—eliminated—the global health security teams. That is global health security, just what we need now. They have eliminated the teams from both the National Security Council and the Department of Homeland Security. And thanks to years of cuts to the global health division at the Centers for Disease Control by the Trump administration, the CDC has been forced to reduce the number of countries it operates in from 49 to 10.

These are our frontlines. If we can deal with these diseases before they get to the United States, we are a lot safer, and the administration has mercilessly and thoughtlessly cut, cut, cut these teams. And then, only a month ago, even as we began to hear about the coronavirus in China, the administration sent us a budget that proposed cutting the CDC budget by 16 percent. The CDC is the agency on the frontlines that keeps us safe, keeps us healthy, and prevents American lives from being lost.

Four words describe the administration's response to the coronavirus: towering and dangerous incompetence. When officials at the CDC rec-

ommended that infected passengers from a cruise ship not be flown to the United States alongside the non-infected passengers, the State Department overruled them. Shockingly, they put infected and noninfected on the same plane. Was this because of politics? Did somebody call President Trump or someone else? There are rumors to that effect. We don't know if they are true. They should be checked out.

Typical of the administration, though, or certainly typical in so many different instances, decisions were made based on politics and optics rather than on the informed opinion of our scientists and doctors. It is like the Soviet apparatchiks overruling the nuclear scientists at Chernobyl to avoid embarrassment to the regime.

Federal agencies have been so hollowed out that one of the key figures in responding to the coronavirus in our government is Ken Cuccinelli, an immigration hard-liner ideologue with no public health expertise. Yesterday, Mr. Cuccinelli posted a tweet actually asking for information about the spread of the coronavirus. The one person the administration can come up with to help deal with the issue then emails and asks for information. This is, of course, because he has no knowledge. He is not a scientist. He is not a disease preventer. This is towering and dangerous incompetence.

President Trump, meanwhile, has said that the coronavirus might “miraculously” fade once the weather gets warmer—towering and dangerous incompetence. With no plan to deal with this potential health crisis, the administration last night issued an emergency budget request. It was too little and too late. It asked Congress to reprogram funding dedicated to fighting Ebola—still considered an epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—to deal with coronavirus. That is robbing Peter to pay Paul. It is further evidence that the administration is not taking the coronavirus as seriously as it should. I said as much last night here on the floor.

The President seemed upset about my criticism of the budget proposal this morning. I am glad he has noticed. Maybe he will start taking this issue more seriously. Now that I have gotten the President's attention, I want to lay out five things the Trump administration must do to get a handle on the coronavirus.

The administration must, at a minimum, restore the cuts to the CDC budget. Trump's cuts to the CDC budget have had dramatic effects, shrinking the agency's footprint abroad to help combat pandemics. The administration must commit now to reverse it.

The Trump administration must appoint a point person—a czar—to implement a real plan to manage the coronavirus: an independent, nonpartisan, global health expert with real expertise, not a political appointee like Cuccinelli—somebody who is a sci-

entist who knows these issues and can coordinate the myriad Federal agencies to fight the fight and prevent American lives from being lost.

The administration must increase its emergency budget request to at least \$3.1 billion with no cuts—no cuts—for Ebola funding, which is still raging in Africa. The \$3.1 billion is the amount our public health organizations say is necessary. The funding must also include a commitment to reimburse States and localities for all expenses related to addressing the outbreak.

The Trump administration must expedite delivery of diagnostic testing kits to all 50 States and public health laboratories so the tests don't have to be sent—these samples don't have to be sent to Atlanta and people wait, wait, and wait for a result as the disease spreads.

And finally, the administration must stop the proliferation of junk insurance plans that do not even cover coronavirus tests and other related healthcare services. This is typical of why we have opposed these junk plans. They cover hardly anything. Now that we have this crisis—the coronavirus—so many people who have these junk plans will not get tested because they can't afford it and because their plans don't cover it, a glaring example of why junk health plans—the administration's solution, it seems, to the health crisis—are totally inadequate and dangerous.

These are five basic steps that any competent administration would have already taken in preparation for the pandemic. There may be others as well, but this is what happens when you have an administration and a President so skeptical of science, so contemptuous of expertise, so practiced in obscuring inconvenient facts, and so disdainful of organization and preparation.

Madam President, you need to get your act together now. This is a crisis. We need you to act. We need this administration to finally do the right thing after weeks of dithering and exhibiting towering and dangerous incompetence.

WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE

Madam President, on another matter also related to healthcare, today Leader MCCONNELL and Senate Republicans have scheduled votes on two divisive, anti-choice, anti-women, and anti-family bills. The Senate has voted them down before; it will again.

After weeks of complaining that the impeachment trial of President Trump was preventing the Senate from doing the people's business, this is what the Senate Republicans have proposed: fake, dishonest, and extreme legislation that has nothing to do with improving the lives of ordinary Americans. I say “fake” because these bills pretend we don't already have laws on the books that protect infants. Additional legislation is completely unnecessary, irrational, a show with no positive effect on the women of America who need healthcare. Healthcare, Mr.

President. Healthcare, Republican Senators. Healthcare. That is what women want, not these show bills that appeal to an extreme view. The American people know it. The American women know it.

Additional legislation such as proposed today is at best unnecessary and irrational. But it is dishonest because these bills are not intended to fix real problems faced by real Americans; they are intended to provoke fear and misunderstanding about a very difficult issue so Republicans can score political points with their far-right base. Any Senator who thinks this is going to appeal to the mainstream of their constituents—women throughout their States—is missing the point.

I say “extreme” because these bills would, in effect, criminalize women’s reproductive care and intimidate healthcare providers—another example of the Senate Republicans’ war on *Roe v. Wade* and a woman’s constitutionally protected right to make her own private healthcare decisions and to not have politicians tell a woman what to do.

Putting these already defeated bills up for a show vote is not a good-faith attempt to improve the lives of everyday Americans—particularly everyday American women—as Republicans claim they want to desperately do. Every single Senate Republican knows these bills cannot and will not pass, but they are putting them on the floor anyway to pander to the hard right and to cover up the fact that they will not provide good healthcare for women, that they are voting day in and day out to take away the right to healthcare of women throughout America and letting the administration, led by President Trump, do just that.

If Republicans were serious about getting back to the people’s business, there is no shortage of bipartisan legislation we could consider. Nearly 400 bills have passed the House, hundreds of them on a bipartisan basis, and they have collected dust in this Chamber. They have gone into Leader McCONNELL’s legislative trash can. On healthcare alone, we have legislation to protect Americans with preexisting conditions, legislation that would eliminate junk insurance plans, and legislation to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates, which my colleague from Illinois will talk about, I believe, shortly. All of these bills have languished in Leader McCONNELL’s legislative junkyard.

When Leader McCONNELL or any Republican says “Oh, impeachment stopped us from doing things,” look at what we are not doing today—not only what we are doing, which is meaningless to women, but what we are not doing—protecting their healthcare, protecting *Roe v. Wade*, which two-thirds of American women want protected.

Any of the proposals that are in McCONNELL’s legislative graveyard would be better than this anti-choice, anti-

women, and anti-family legislation, but, typical of Leader McCONNELL, Republicans have chosen once again to play politics on the Senate floor.

Leader McCONNELL should stop wasting the few votes he does schedule with these shameless political stunts and instead bring legislation to the floor that would actually improve the healthcare of the American people and of American women in particular.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. LOEFFLER). The Democratic whip is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I would like to note that this morning at 8 a.m., an unusual meeting took place in this Capitol Building. It was in the area of the building that is reserved for top-secret classified briefings. All Members of the Senate were invited. The issue at that briefing was the coronavirus.

I sat through the major part of that briefing before I had to leave for another meeting. There wasn’t anything in there that should have been classified or top secret. If there were ever a time when we need to be open, honest, and complete in telling the whole story to the American people, it is this moment when we face the coronavirus, which started, we believe, in China and is now spreading across the world.

I back up what the Democratic leader said earlier because the request was made at this meeting for some \$2 billion in the United States to respond to this coronavirus threat. When we questioned the administration as to why that number and what they were going to do with it, the answers were limited. In fact, when it came to the source of the money, they had no answer at all.

Remember, this is an administration which has consistently asked to cut the funding for the Centers for Disease Control. It has been a low priority of the Trump administration until we faced this threat, and now they have suddenly awakened. It turns out that even in the next fiscal year, which begins on October 1, the Trump administration has asked to cut the money for the Centers for Disease Control again.

You ask yourself, who is in charge over there? Who is making the basic decisions? Well, it could be the person who has decided that every available dollar needs to be put into a wall on the Mexican border.

Think of this for a moment: Ten billion dollars currently sits in an account for the building of this wall—unspent. They can’t spend it. Yet the President recently asked for \$3.8 billion more for building his almighty wall—which I thought Mexico was going to pay for—and now comes at the last minute asking for some \$2 billion for the coronavirus.

As one Senator said in the meeting this morning, when it comes down to it, if our business is to protect the American people, isn’t the highest priority to stop the spread of this virus in

the United States? Of course it is, and that is why it should be a higher priority. No wall is going to stop that virus from coming into the United States. The President ought to wake up to that reality.

When you look at the efforts that are being made here in the United States and around the world, we can and should do more. I support this request for a dramatic increase in funding for this purpose now—now, before it spreads across the United States, which God forbid it ever does. We don’t want it to. We want to make sure we have done everything in our power to stop it, and that means empowering those in charge with the knowledge, with the expertise, and with the authority to protect our families. First and foremost, protect American families. That is a much higher priority than any campaign promise this President made about a wall on our southern border.

I support the effort by Senator SCHUMER asking for some top doc or some individual with management authority, management experience, and the knowledge of the public health threat we face with this coronavirus, to be put in charge to coordinate the myriad agencies that will be touched by this campaign to protect America. Now is the time to do it. The time to do it—at least now, but it should have been much earlier, with more money dedicated to this purpose rather than cutting back on these key agencies.

WOMEN’S HEALTHCARE

Madam President, on a related topic, related to health, this morning Senator MITCH McCONNELL came to the floor and said that today, this afternoon, we are likely to take up two votes on motions to proceed. This is so typical now of what we do in the Senate. Instead of bringing a measure to the floor with an understanding of an amendment process so that we can discuss it fully, vote on it in many different aspects, and then come to a conclusion with a majority vote in this body, Senator McCONNELL comes to the floor with another drive-by political hit on the issue of women’s reproductive health.

We know what this issue is all about. Many of us who have served for years know there is a fundamental difference among those of us here in the Senate, and we know what the outcome of this vote will be because at least one of these votes was cast last year on exactly the same topic. So why would Senator McCONNELL bring it back? It is to get that drive-by shooting when it comes to this political issue. To me, that is unfortunate, and I would like to suggest there is a better alternative.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Madam President, this is Black History Month, and I want to take the time to celebrate a person who made history when it came to healthcare.

Helen Octavia Dickens was born in Dayton, OH, in 1909, a daughter of a former slave. She attended Crane Junior College in Chicago, now Malcolm X