



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 116th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 166

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020

No. 51

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Thursday, March 19, 2020, at 9 a.m.

Senate

TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2020

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord of majesty, in spite of our challenges, Your glory and power continues to inspire us. We exalt Your Name, even when we are overwhelmed by the problems we face.

Lord, breathe Your strength and peace into our Senators and use them for Your glory. May they continue to totally depend on You, knowing that with Your mighty power You will surround them with the shield of Your blessing.

Holy God, Your goodness will prevail until the end of time.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate for 1 minute in morning business.

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, as the coronavirus spreads, U.S. Federal health and intelligence agencies are working hard to protect the public. It is critical that their hard work not go to waste. Federal health agencies must have access to all intelligence community information that could help combat this pandemic. To help with that access, the intelligence community must guard against overclassifying information. In situations like this, information is power. Our Federal health and intelligence agencies are the best in the world. Let's show the world that America can stop the spread of this virus.

My tweet for the morning is this:

2day at 948AM we just received the bill from the House the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" What business do democrats hv blaming McConnell all wknd for not calling a vote when we can't do anything until the House sends it over? They know better Stop the politics!

This is in response to 172 calls my office got yesterday wondering why we have not voted on this important bill. So it is important for me to remind everybody that the Senate can't pass this bill or even debate this bill until the House sends it over. We have now received it, and I assume we will soon do that.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, as the global outbreak of the new coronavirus continues to grow, its impact on American families and small businesses is continuing to scale up. School closures are challenging both parents and teachers. Childcare closures are complicating family life even further. Main Street small businesses and their employees are grappling with an unprecedented situation, where their local leaders are effectively winding down their businesses for a period of time through no fault of their own. Major industries that our Nation relies on have seen businesses virtually dry up overnight—again, not due to any business decision they made but because of appropriate directives from public health experts. And most important of all, our healthcare system and our doctors, nurses, and other frontline professionals are gearing up for what seems very likely to be the most significant nationwide challenge they have faced in generations. At every level, this new challenge is testing or Nation and our institutions.

Yesterday, my home State of Kentucky reported its first coronavirus-related death. Our thoughts are with the family, friends, and neighbors in Bourbon County, who are mourning.

I spoke with Governor Beshear yesterday, and we are continuing to stay in close touch. The Bluegrass has now confirmed 25 total cases to date.

And we are heeding the sober warning of Dr. Fauci. This is what Dr. Fauci said: "Things will get worse before they get better."

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S1765

It is abundantly clear that our Nation cannot afford partisan politics as usual. This is a moment for bold and bipartisan action. That is what the Senate did earlier this month when we passed billions of dollars in targeted funding to assist medical professionals and responders in every State and to ease the initial shock to small businesses. And that is what the Senate needs to expand on this week—bold and bipartisan action.

Yesterday evening, the House finally completed its work on their coronavirus relief proposal, made a number of changes, and sent the paperwork over here to the Senate.

I know Senators on both sides are eager to assist workers, families, and small businesses with the financial fallout of this extraordinary period. So, as I said yesterday afternoon, Senate Republicans are convinced that the House's noncomprehensive bill can only be the beginning—the beginning—of our efforts to support our health system, assist individual Americans and families, as well as stabilize the U.S. economy.

So, last night, a group of Republican Senators conferred with Secretary Mnuchin. He is returning to the Capitol to meet with our entire conference today. We are continuing urgent talks on further legislation that will address head-on the three major priorities we have spent the last several days discussing in depth.

No. 1, we need to provide more direct assistance for American workers and families.

No. 2, we need further strong steps to secure our economic foundation, most especially our small businesses. In particular, it seems increasingly clear that the House's effort to mandate that small businesses provide new worker benefits, just as many small businesses themselves are in significant jeopardy, might even be actually harmful unless we urgently address a broader package that includes more and broader small business relief.

And, No. 3, of course, the foundational priority is to continue providing all the support that our medical professionals need as they fight this new virus on the frontlines.

These conversations are ongoing. We are making progress. The House of Representatives may have left town, but the Senate is right here at work. We are crafting the major legislation that the American people deserve in the face of this major challenge. It is my intention that the Senate will not adjourn until we have passed significant and bold new steps—above and beyond what the House has passed—to help our strong Nation and our strong underlying economy weather this storm.

Now, before I conclude this morning, I wanted to take a moment to echo and amplify the updated guidance that our public health experts and the White House rolled out yesterday. As President Trump said yesterday, the next 2

weeks are an important opportunity. Our Nation will have a major say in how long the virus will spread within the United States before it is contained.

Following the commonsense steps laid out by the White House Coronavirus Task Force can significantly reduce each American's risk of being exposed or spreading the virus within communities.

First, obviously, those who feel sick, stay home. Those who feel sick, stay home. Unwell children should be kept at home. And anyone with questions about their symptoms should contact their medical provider.

Wherever possible, Americans should engage in work or school from home. Those who cannot, including those whose in-person job functions are central to our government or our Nation, must take especially seriously the CDC's guidelines for health and hygiene, especially washing hands and social distancing.

All Americans have been strongly urged to avoid eating or drinking out, to avoid discretionary travel, and to avoid visiting nursing homes or retirement facilities unless—unless—it is to provide critical assistance.

Some of these recommendations sound like basic common sense. Others of them would have sounded almost unthinkable just a few weeks ago.

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the pace of change over the past weeks and days, but Americans are strong. We are resilient. This is a proud Nation with a world-changing history, and we have come through far greater challenges than this. This is not a time for fear or panic. It is a time to follow the facts, listen carefully to the experts, and take precautions to protect not only ourselves but the most vulnerable in our society. Every single one of us can do our part.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Illinois.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, yesterday, the President of the United States and the Centers for Disease Control contacted us individually and at least through the media to advise us to avoid gatherings of more than 10 people. It is a reflection of the national emergency we face and the public health crisis that America is facing head-on, as it should.

This morning, as we opened the Senate, there were 18 people gathered on the floor of the Senate—3 Senators and 15 staff people. As those who follow all the Senate can tell, our staffers come to work, as they are expected to, but come under circumstances that are more challenging than they were just a few weeks ago.

I want to thank each and every one of them here on the floor, as well as the many who you don't see, behind the scenes, who are necessary for the opening of this Capitol and for the protection of everyone who works here. There are policemen and there are people engaged in basic activities here who keep this magnificent structure functioning, and they come here now in the midst of a public health challenge, where most every American has been told to stay home: If you can possibly stay home, do it; for social distancing, make certain that you stay a certain distance between yourself and some other person. Yet they come here, and we thank them for it.

The obvious question is, Why are we here under these circumstances? We were called back into a week of legislative activity, which had been scheduled to be a week where we were back home in our individual States. There is a lot for me to do back home, and I am sure that is true for every Senator, from the crises which we had at O'Hare Airport—I was working on that on Saturday and Sunday night—to the issue of closing schools and feeding children, and all of the other issues that are part of this coronavirus challenge.

But we were told to come back here this week, to make a trip back, to fly back from wherever, to come to the U.S. Capitol for two reasons. We were told we had to pass the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act reauthorization because it expired as of last weekend. It turns out that we have found a way to avoid a necessary vote at the last minute. The Senate Republican leader agreed last night, just a few minutes before the scheduled vote, to accept a proposal that had been made to him by Republican Senator MIKE LEE of Utah last Thursday. The Senate Republican leader did not accept it then. He accepted it last night. The net result was we didn't have to be present. We didn't have to make the journey for that purpose.

The second part of our return is equally important and maybe more so in light of this public health crisis, and that was to consider the measure that was taken up by the House of Representatives and passed in the early-morning hours of Saturday. This measure, known as the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, is the second piece of legislation we have considered and, I am sure, not the last. We are already talking about the coronavirus 3 act, which is likely to be debated and voted on soon.

The point I am making is this measure, which was physically sent to us last night with technical corrections,