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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

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 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.

Holy God, we love You. You are our strength, rock, and protection. Use our Senators today to make our Nation safer and better. May they often think of the positive legacy they can lead through faithful service to You and country.

Lord, remind them that You have brought our Nation through much greater difficulties than the ones we now face. As they strive to unite for the common good of this land we love, may they embrace Your promise that You will never leave or forsake us.

We pray in Your merciful 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. LOEFFLER). The Senator from Iowa is recognized.

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, the Trump administration wants the U.S.-Mexico-Canada agreement to enter into force by June 1. I am eager, as well, for that to happen, but we must first ensure that Canada and Mexico are complying with their commitments under that agreement.

I am especially concerned that the June 1 date presents unique challenges for the U.S. oil industry, when it is already facing significant supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19.

As we learned in 2009, the health of the auto industry is critical to the health of the entire American economy. I urge the administration to take very seriously the concerns expressed by the highest level of the auto industry to ensure a reasonable timeline for entry into force of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada agreement auto regulations.

It would be prudent right now to let these companies focus instead on the health of their workforce and supply chains.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, every day our country grows more affected by the continued spread of the coronavirus. Every American is feeling the anxiety and uncertainty of this national challenge—older Americans and young Americans, healthy Americans and those with underlying medical conditions, parents, teachers, working Americans, and small business owners, certainly, our first responders and healthcare professionals. Everyone—everyone—is impacted in different ways and to different degrees, but all Americans are affected.

All of us have seen our daily lives transformed in what feels like the blink of an eye. That is the bad news, and it is the good news too. We are all in this together—all in it together. Our Nation faces this serious challenge, but working together we can take bold steps to combat it.

Earlier this month, Congress passed billions in urgent funding for public health and small businesses, and this Senate majority remains committed to taking further bold steps to preserve and protect the economic foundations of our country.

Later today, the Senate will vote on a House proposal that seeks to address one small piece of the problem before us. It is a well-intentioned, bipartisan product assembled by House Democrats

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



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and President Trump's team that tries to stand up and expand some new relief measures for American workers.

I will vote to pass their bill. This is the time for urgent, bipartisan action, and, in this case, I do not believe we should let perfection be the enemy of something that would help even a subset of workers.

However, the House's bill has real shortcomings. It does not even begin to cover all of the Americans who will need help in the days ahead. And, more specifically, it achieves one of its signature policies by imposing a new, untested mandate on small businesses without—without—guaranteeing they will have sufficient funds in advance to finance this new employee benefit.

Everyone agrees that workers need relief. The Republicans are working on bold solutions to help individuals and families as we speak, but small businesses need relief as well.

This is literally the worst time in living memory to pile even more burdens and costs onto small businesses, which are, themselves, fighting to stay alive unless—unless—we back it up with major assistance.

We all know what small businesses are up against. Just this week, New York City joined the list of towns and cities across the country where local officials have shuttered every bar and every restaurant for the sake of public health. At 5 p.m. today, all public-facing businesses in my home State of Kentucky will do the same. These job creators are literally being taken offline by their own governments for the public good.

It is not only bars, restaurants, and entertainment businesses we need to worry about. Nobody expects Main Street small businesses of any sort to hold the kind of cash buffer they would need to remain in business and wait out a national economic disruption that could last for weeks or months.

Men and women who pour their entire lives into small businesses do not need even more obstacles. They need help. They need a lifeline. They need to know that Congress understands the historic obstacles they are facing and that we have their back as well.

There is no moral hazard here. This is not some rescue following risky business decisions. Nobody thinks any of this is the fault of small businesses. So while I will support the House bill in order to secure emergency relief for some American workers, I will not adjourn the Senate until we have passed a far bolder package that must include significant relief for small businesses all across our country.

As we speak, Chairman RUBIO, Senator COLLINS, and others are assembling a historic level of assistance for small businesses across America. We want to help them survive this disruption, absorb the new mandate in the House bill, and continue to make payroll and avoid layoffs as much as they can and emerge this storm in the best shape possible. That means a historic

injection of liquidity and access to credit, and it means Washington working directly with the lenders who already work with these small businesses to minimize the new bureaucracy so the assistance can flow as fast as possible.

So we are going to pass the House's bill, but its imperfections will just make our more comprehensive package even more urgent. So we aren't leaving. So everybody understands, we aren't leaving until we deliver. The Senate is not going to leave small businesses behind.

This will be just one component of our work. As we speak, Chairman GRASSLEY and others are determining the best pathway to put money directly in the hands of the American people—those who are employed, those who may be laid off, retirees, disabled Americans, families—as quickly as possible.

Of course, Chairman ALEXANDER and a number of our colleagues are working on further steps in our public health fight against the virus itself, such as getting more tools in the hands of healthcare providers, removing barriers to treatment, and helping researchers develop therapeutics and vaccines.

Chairman WICKER and several Senators are considering the possibility of targeted relief for key industries that are shouldering an outsized burden from the public health directives and which our Nation will need to be operational on the other side of this.

We are crafting bold and significant legislation to meet this crisis head-on and to strengthen our Nation.

The Congress has an enormous role to play in responding to this challenge, and we are determined to do that duty. But, at the same time, never in our Nation's history have Americans looked solely to Washington for answers. That is not who we are. This is no different.

Even amidst the uncertainty, the American people are stepping up and reminding everyone what solidarity and citizenship look like. In my home State, Kentuckians are going out of their way to stand with their neighbors. Stay-at-home parents are volunteering to help neighbors with childcare when parents are unable to telework. Grocery stores in the Louisville area are setting aside the first hour they are open each day, right after their cleaning, so older shoppers and those with underlying conditions can shop first and with less exposure. One local restaurant is distributing free meals to service industry workers whose hours have been cut.

This is what makes the United States of America what it is, and it is what we are today: generosity, friendship, resolve, and strength.

This is not a challenge anyone wanted for our Nation, but it is a challenge we will overcome. Someday—hopefully, soon—our Nation will have this virus on its heels, mainstream small businesses will be thriving again, and fami-

lies will be flying around the country again to reunite and catch up. We will have gotten through this together. In part, it will be because the Federal Government and Congress did our part, but, just as important, it will also be because every single American did theirs.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Madam President, some observations about how we will conduct the voting that will likely occur later today, for the information of all of our colleagues. What we will do is have a 30-minute rollcall vote. We want to avoid congregating here in the well. I would encourage our colleagues to come in and vote and depart the Chamber so we don't have gaggles of conversation here on the floor. That is particularly important for our staff here in the front of the Chamber.

So I would encourage everyone to take full advantage of the full 30-minute rollcall vote. Come in and vote and leave, and be aware of the social distancing that Dr. Monahan and others have recommended as we come over to the Chamber and as we depart. With that, I think we will be able to get through the voting that will occur, in all likelihood, later today without violating any of the safety precautions that have been recommended to us by the Capitol physician and others.

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.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I come to the floor this morning with sad news. Illinois has lost its first resident to the coronavirus—a pandemic which is threatening our country and the world. Her name was Patricia Friesen, 61 years old, a retired nurse. She was an exceptional person. Her brother said she cared for everyone but herself. She lived taking care of people, and she loved it.