

every day—like law enforcement and grocery clerks—doing their part to help provide us the healthcare, the law enforcement, and the food that is feeding our families.

We know, for weeks on end, our doctors and nurses and first responders have put themselves in harm's way to save the lives of those who have been affected by COVID-19. They are offering more than lifesaving care. These men and women are a hand to hold, a friendly voice, and a source of comfort to patients isolated from friends and family because of this cruel disease. Our heroic healthcare workers are physically and mentally exhausted from this fight. Yet they continue to serve, day in and day out.

I want to express my gratitude, and I know I speak for others when I say thank you for the heart that you have put into your job and for the sacrifices you have made, spending time away from your families so that you can help ours.

At the same time, we are seeing tremendous progress in a race to develop both treatments and a vaccine. While there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about how this story ends, I know a lot of work remains to be done. In addition to the physical toll this virus has taken on the American people, it has wreaked economic havoc.

In order to slow the spread of the coronavirus, stores and restaurants have closed their doors, travel plans have been abandoned, events have been canceled, and millions of Americans were suddenly without a way to earn a living. In the past 6 weeks, 30 million Americans have filed for unemployment—an absolutely staggering figure.

So far, Congress has passed four separate bills to address this crisis from a public health standpoint as well as to ease its economic impact. We have provided billions of dollars in funding to support our hospitals, increase testing capacity, and ramp up the production and acquisition of the personal protective equipment our medical workers rely upon as well as the ventilators that many of the COVID-19 patients will need.

We have provided unprecedented assistance for America's small businesses, which employ about half of America's workers. The Paycheck Protection Program has enabled small businesses to keep their employees on the payroll and cover expenses until the smoke clears.

We have also sent vital funding to our State and local governments—about \$150 billion. We provided relief to student loan borrowers and sent financial assistance to the American people in the form of direct payments from the IRS.

Members of Congress came together to act quickly and decisively to address this pandemic, and I am very proud of the work that we have done together so far.

Over the past several weeks, like every Senator, I have had the privilege

of speaking with my constituents all across the State of Texas about the impact of this virus as well as Congress's response. I have spoken to doctors, nurses, and hospital administrators about the strain on the personnel and the need for personal protective equipment.

I have talked to small business owners across the State about their growing list of expenses and the lifeline that the PPE provided.

I have listened to our mayors and county judges, from our biggest cities and smallest towns, who have talked about the mounting financial burdens they are facing. I have talked with our farmers and ranchers about the impact on everything from cattle to cotton and the need to protect our food supply chain.

I am grateful for the men and women I have spoken with who have shared their perspective and feedback about Congress's response to the coronavirus.

Anytime a piece of legislation moves this quickly, as these bills did, and are this big, there are bound to be gaps that need to be filled, mistakes that need to be corrected, tweaks that need to be applied. The Texans to whom I have spoken over these past several weeks have pointed out some of those gaps and provided ideas for the discussions we are now having about what comes next.

A few weeks ago, I spoke with representatives from the Texas Council on Family Violence, the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault, and more than a dozen organizations across the State that support survivors of domestic violence.

When you think about the impact of the pandemic or any other major crisis, for that matter, domestic violence isn't typically one of the first issues that comes to mind, but the circumstances we are facing today make these cases all too common. People are spending more time isolated at home. They are dealing with a new range of stresses brought on by this virus—more time with their partner, financial struggles, teaching their children at home—and it is taking a devastating toll.

When Texas's stay-at-home order was first announced, many organizations saw a spike in their hotline calls. What is more frightening, once these orders were in place, the number of calls took a sharp decline. In Tarrant County, which is where Fort Worth is located, call numbers dropped by almost half.

With so much time isolated at home with an abuser, it may be more difficult to reach out to friends or family or contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline for assistance. When deciding whether to leave, to go to a shelter, there is also the risk of the virus itself, and many are faced with a lose-lose scenario: Do you continue living under the same roof as your abuser or do you go to a shelter where you or your children may come in contact with the virus?

These are not the only silent victims of this crisis. The fear and anxiety

brought on by this pandemic has taken a toll on America's mental health. Most of us have never gone through something like this. Maybe none of us has gone through something quite like this. Our daily routines have been turned on their head. Isolated from friends and family and between social media and a 24-hour news cycle, it can be difficult to find a way to escape the constant barrage of bad news and anxiety.

Compounding the problem even further is the financial strain on many of the providers who support these individuals. A recent survey of providers by the National Council for Behavioral Health showed that more than 60 percent of mental health providers have already been forced to close one or more programs—60 percent—and 62 percent of providers cannot survive more than 3 months without emergency financial assistance.

As we continue working to help the American people through this difficult time, we cannot forget those who are suffering in silence. We have a big job ahead of us. That is why it is so important that we are here doing our job on behalf of the 330 million people in this country.

I returned back to the Senate with a long list of ideas and feedback from the Texans who have been generous enough to spend time talking with me over the past few weeks. I know all 100 Members of the Senate are in a similar position, and I hope we can retain the same sense of bipartisanship that has guided us through the legislation we have passed so far.

If we are going to win this fight—and we will—it will not be because of a Republican idea or a Democratic one; it will be because every single person in this Chamber checked their political priorities at the door and responded together—united—to confront and defeat this virus and to help restore our economy and the jobs that go along with it.

We have done it before. Let's do it again.

I yield the floor.

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. CARPER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NOMINATION OF ROBERT J. FEITEL

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I rise today to speak on behalf of the nomination of Robert Feitel to serve as inspector general of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which oversees the safety and security of almost 100 nuclear powerplants throughout this country—an important job.

This is a nomination I urged the majority to take up and pass, not this week, not this month but before we went into recess on April 8. We are

here, and this is a good nomination. I hope my colleagues will support it.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, having said that, let me remind my colleagues that we are still in the middle of a global pandemic—if we need to be reminded. I don't think we do. But once we have voted on the nomination before us today, I would urge the Senate to pivot and begin focusing next on examining issues related to the pandemic and to ensuring that the assistance we provided in the legislation we have passed so far—four pieces, some bigger than others—is getting to the families and the communities that badly need it. If we were unable or unwilling to do so, I am not sure that the Senate should be returning to Washington to act on non-urgent business in contravention of the recommendation of the Office of the Attending Physician and while this entire region is still under stay-at-home orders.

I also want to make it clear that the Environment and Public Works Committee, on which I serve and lead with Senator JOHN BARRASSO of Wyoming, was willing to approve this particular nomination unanimously by voice vote, but it is what is it is, and we are here today.

In the midst of a global pandemic, the majority leader says he is concerned with nominations. Well, then, let's address positions that are actually more relevant to the crisis that we face today.

Currently, one-third of the inspector general positions that are confirmed by the Senate remain either vacant or without permanent leadership. The President has nominated individuals to fill some, but not all, of these positions. The Senate should work quickly to vet those nominees we have received, especially those who would be involved with oversight for the coronavirus response.

My colleagues will recall that this past March Congress passed an unprecedented \$2 trillion relief package, the CARES Act, to bring help to millions of Americans who find themselves in dire straits through no fault of their own. Thankfully, the CARES Act created three new separate oversight bodies to monitor this emergency funding. I was also proud to work with Democrats and Republican colleagues alike to help secure an additional \$20 million to ensure that the Government Accountability Office, which is known as GAO, can conduct important oversight of this funding. In fact, I learned last week that GAO has already notified Congress that it has already either undertaken or begun investigations or has planned investigations of over 150 audits that are related to this funding. Now, I appreciate GAO's diligence on this important matter; not only do I appreciate it, but we appreciate it, and the American taxpayers appreciate it as well.

More than ever, it is critical that we have robust oversight to make sure

that this money gets into the pockets of those who need it most and not into the pockets of those who would literally steal money from the needy and steal money from the taxpayers of this country.

If our majority leader wants to bring the Senate back, then I would like to suggest that our time would be well spent making sure that those oversight bodies created in the CARES Act are fully functional, including the CARES Act Congressional Oversight Commission, which I am told still lacks a chairperson. This is a five-person panel. It is one created by each of our leaders in the House and the Senate. That would give us four, and then another one would be jointly agreed to by the majority leader here and the Speaker of the House. I am told that as of today, as of this moment, we still lack a chairperson of that important panel. I hope that our leader here, Leader MCCONNELL, and Speaker PELOSI will work with haste even today—even today—to jointly name a chair to the Congressional Oversight Commission as required by law.

The CARES Act also created the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee. That is a committee composed of inspectors general from relevant agencies to oversee all spending appropriated through the CARES Act. That is a huge undertaking. Unfortunately, those IG positions at key agencies, including the Treasury Department and including the Department of Education, still remain vacant.

We have seen over the last month just how crucial it is that our IGs remain independent. Since the Senate was last in session, the President has unceremoniously removed, reassigned, or undermined highly regarded inspectors general who apparently weren't loyal enough to him or who dared to criticize what they viewed as a failed or flawed response to the coronavirus. For example, at the beginning of April, President Trump removed Glenn Fine, a highly regarded acting inspector general for the Pentagon, who had only a week earlier been selected by his peers—selected by his peers—to chair the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, the third oversight body created by the CARES Act.

We have also seen the President look to replace the Health and Human Services IG who, in a detailed report, pointed out the severe shortages that a number of our hospitals have been facing during the coronavirus outbreak.

I believe it is clear that Congress needs to speak up when appropriate and do a better job supporting our inspectors general when this President—or frankly any President—takes retaliatory action against the independent watchdogs responsible for identifying failures, waste, fraud, and abuse across our Federal Government, especially when this much money is at risk.

If the Senate is going to be back in session, it would seem to me these critical oversight positions should be among our top priorities.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT J. FEITEL

Mr. President, having said that, let me turn again to the nomination before the Senate today. Like all agencies, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission needs a strong and independent inspector general, and I believe in Mr. Feitel we have one. I believe he is up to the task.

We cannot be complacent when it comes to nuclear safety. Just remember, 50 percent of the carbon-free energy produced in this country is produced by our nuclear powerplants. Think about that. In a day and age when the climate crisis is a huge threat literally to our planet and those of us who live on it, right now, half of the carbon-free electricity comes in this country from nuclear powerplants.

It is the job of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to oversee those plants and make sure they are being run well, run safely, and in ways that enable us to continue to depend on them as we go forward for carbon-free electricity.

Anyway, Mr. Feitel is well qualified and prepared, I think; certainly the Environment and Public Works Committee believes he is prepared to take on this responsibility. I hope my colleagues will join Senator BARRASSO, our chairman, and myself and the members of our committee to vote yes on this nomination.

With that, I don't see anybody waiting to speak after me, so I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING JIM CUMMINGS

Mr. BRAUN. Mr. President, I rise to honor and recognize the life and contributions of Mr. Jim Cummings to the countless Hoosiers whose lives he touched over nine decades.

Jim was a giant in Indiana. His long and rich life left many indelible marks on our State. We look to people like Jim Cummings as an example of a life well lived in service to others. His role in founding the Indiana Black Expo in 1970 made him a leader to all Hoosiers during a time of great change in our State and our Nation. As a lifelong servant to those in his State and community, his dedication to conservative principles guided his thoughts and actions for many years.

His life of service extended beyond his work with the Indiana Black Expo. It included serving his community in public office on a number of boards in Indianapolis and working as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Ronald Reagan.

Indiana has lost one of its most distinguished Hoosiers of this generation.