Right now, we have hope that, once daily commutes and nonessential travel resume, more Texas energy workers will be back on the job and our economy will rebound. But if our country were to implement the policies advocated by leading Democrats, particularly their Presidential and Vice Presidential nominee, that hope would altogether disappear.

This is not the time, if ever there was a time, to implement heavy-handed, short-sighted government policies like that. Our energy industry is still reeling from the impact of the coronavirus, and our Democratic colleagues' disastrous policies would not make that better; it would make it worse.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I am glad I was here to hear the wise words of the Senator from Texas. I look at our region, in the Tennessee Valley, compared to California. California is moving ahead with a policy a lot like Vice President Biden's. They have got a high goal for powering that whole State on wind and solar and closing their nuclear plants.

What is happening in California? Rates are going through the roof, and they are having rolling blackouts. What is happening in Tennessee and the Tennessee Valley? The TVA has very wisely expanded nuclear power so that it is more than 40 percent of our electricity.

Of course, nuclear power is totally emission-free—no carbon, zero carbon—it is reliable, and it is, by far, most of the carbon-free electricity we produce in this country. The combination of that nuclear power, hydropower, and natural gas in Tennessee has given us one of the cleanest areas. In the East Tennessee area where I live, I can see the mountains clearly now because pollution control is on all the coal plants.

So we need a realistic energy policy, not a fanciful one. We don't want rolling blackouts throughout the country like California has because they have adopted exactly the policy that Vice President Biden is advocating.

VACCINE SAFETY

Mr. President, I come to the floor to speak on another subject. I want to talk about science and vaccines.

The Governors of New York and California have announced they are creating their own State review panels to review COVID–19 vaccine data as it becomes available. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo said: ''Frankly, I'm not going to trust the Federal Government's opinion.''

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom has Stated the vaccine won't be distributed in California until it is reviewed by a State panel of experts. The Governor of California said on October 20: ''Of course, we won't take anyone's word for it.''

Every day, Americans take the word of Food and Drug Administration's career scientists on the safety and effectiveness of the prescriptions they approve when we purchase 3.8 billion prescriptions a year. Let me say that again. We take the word of the FDA career scientists every day when we purchase 3.8 billion prescriptions each year.

I asked Dr. Stephen Hahn, the FDA Commissioner, on September 23, about the safety of a potential COVID–19 vaccine. He was testifying on COVID–19 in front of the Health Committee, which I chair and of which the Senator from Indiana is a valued member. I asked him:

Dr. Hahn, who makes decisions about safety and efficacy at the FDA? Do you do it? Do career scientists do it? Or does the White House do it?

Dr. Hahn replied:

Career scientists at the FDA do it. That's very clear. I'm briefed on all major medical product decisions. Overruling a center's decision is a very rare event. I have expressed on multiple occasions my intention, and have done so during this COVID–19 pandemic, to make sure that those decisions are made by career scientists in the centers.

I followed up by asking Dr. Hahn's confidence in taking a COVID–19 vaccine himself. I said:

You referred to this, but once FDA approves a vaccine, and as we've said today, we're going to have tens of millions of doses ready, none can be distributed until FDA approves it. Will you be willing to take that vaccine for you and for your family?

He replied:

Absolutely. Yes. Mr. Chairman, I have complete and absolute faith in the expertise of the scientists who are terrific at FDA. If they were to make a determination that a vaccine would be safe and effective, I would do that. And I would encourage my family to take the vaccine.

Those are the words of the man whose job it is to finally approve any COVID–19 vaccine.

But then, at the beginning of this month, as FDA was preparing to issue additional guidance on the data needed from vaccine developers to demonstrate safety and efficacy for an emergency use authorization, there were serious questions about whether the White House was politicizing the FDA's approval of vaccines for COVID–19.

The FDA had submitted its guidance. That guidance was written by career scientists. Those scientists had decades of experience, and what they wrote were the standards that were going to be used for the approval of vaccines against COVID–19.

Then news reports of White House interference came out which suggested the White House was going to change the FDA guidance or that the White House was not going to allow the FDA to release its own guidance. Many were concerned about that, including me.

The New York Times, on October 5, had a big headline: ''White House Blocks New Coronavirus Vaccine Guidelines.'' And it went on to say, ''The F.D.A. proposed stricter guidelines for emergency approval of a coronavirus vaccine, but the White House chief of staff objected to provisions that would push approval past Election Day.'' That was the New York Times.

And FOX News said: ''Trump administration to block FDA guidelines that could delay coronavirus vaccine.'' That is FOX News. ''The FDA proposed stricter guidance last month that could prolong the timeline for a vaccine,'' FOX News said.

There were many stories to this effect. I could barely leave my office without some reporter asking me if I was concerned about this, about the politicization of the vaccine review process.

So I telephoned White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, and I asked him about it. I said to him: ''Please do not interfere with the standards set by the career scientists at FDA for the approval of a COVID–19 vaccine.'' The White House did exactly what I urged the White House to do. The White House respected the decisions of the career scientists. They did not change one word of the standards set by the career scientists for the approval of COVID–19 vaccines.

So I would suggest that the Governors of New York and California do the same. They should show the same respect to the FDA career scientists that the White House did. Undermining the FDA's gold standard of safety and efficacy by setting up State review panels could delay approval, discourage Americans from taking the vaccine, and cost lives.

There is a reason why we Americans rely on the Federal Government's Food and Drug Administration for the safety and efficacy of vaccines. In 1902, Congress decided, when it passed the Biologics Control Act, that the Federal Government should regulate vaccines after tragic incidents of children dying from contaminated diphtheria antitoxin and smallpox vaccines.

This law charged the Federal laboratory that would later become the National Institutes of Health in 1930 with ensuring the ''safety, purity, and potency'' of biologic products such as vaccines.

Then, in 1972, the regulation of vaccines moved to the Food and Drug Administration, to what is now called the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

FDA, therefore, has had almost 50 years of experience to refine the process for reviewing safety and efficacy for vaccines, including what data to look at and how to design clinical trials to prove that the vaccines work and that the vaccines are safe.

Earlier this week, the FDA convened independent scientific and medical experts to discuss this. They talked about the development, authorization, and approval of vaccines for COVID–19. This is not a new process for assessing vaccines. The FDA routinely convenes these type of independent panels to help inform its review. Dr. Peter Marks, head of the Center for Biologics

Evaluation and Research, at FDA, wrote this about the vaccine advisory committee's role on FDA's website:

> The committee will hear presentations from experts in COVID–19 disease and vaccine development, as well as from career FDA scientists. Topics will include studies needed to support authorization or approval, post-marketing safety studies needed following an approval, and what would be necessary for ongoing safety monitoring following issuance of an emergency use authorization for COVID–19 vaccine.

Dr. Marks continued:

> There will also be a part of the meeting during which members of the public will have an opportunity to speak and provide input, and this will be followed by a thorough discussion of the issues by the committee members. The members of this committee are external scientific and public health experts from around the country, specializing in fields such as immunology, virology, infectious diseases, pediatrics, vaccine development, and vaccine safety.

This meeting, and any other FDA advisory committee meeting, can be viewed by the public. At the Senate Health Committee hearing on September 23, where FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn testified, I reviewed the three steps that have to happen before FDA will approve a vaccine: No. 1, independent experts overseeing clinical trials determine whether there is enough data available for the FDA to review.

No. 2, after demonstrating safety and efficacy based on clinical trials, the vaccine manufacturer submits an application to the FDA.

And No. 3, FDA experts conduct their review and make the final determination whether or not it is safe and that it works.

In other words, no one knows when the vaccine will be ready to distribute. No one knows that, even Dr. Hahn. And why does he not know it? Because there is this elaborate, independent, public process established by career scientists, with not a word changed by the White House, that will review the data and then make a decision. Because of the work of Congress and the administration, tens of millions of doses are being manufactured. So when that approval comes—whether it is November, December, or January—there will be tens of millions of doses of vaccine ready to distribute to the American people. But that approval won't come until the career scientists' rules are followed.

The FDA is considered the gold standard in the world, in part because it is one of the few regulatory agencies in the world that looks at detailed clinical trial data as part of its review, rather than summaries of clinical trial data.

The FDA Division making the decision to approve or authorize a vaccine for COVID–19 is led by experts with decades of experience, including Dr. Peter Marks, whom I mentioned, the head of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research. He has been at the center since 2012. Dr. Celia Witten has been at FDA since 1996. The Vaccine Division of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research is led by Dr. Marion Gruber, who has over 20 years of experience in regulatory review and approval of vaccines and biologics. The Deputy Director of the Vaccine Division, Dr. Philip Krause, has 10 years of experience at FDA working on vaccines. FDA will also have the advice of independent advisory committees.

California and New York—no State will be able to assemble a scientific panel of experts with the same high level of knowledge and experience reviewing safety and efficacy information as exists at the Food and Drug Administration. Democratic Governors in those two States should not both be telling President Trump that he ought to follow the advice of scientists like Dr. Fauci, which he should do, but at the same time undermine the review and the work of similar career scientists at the Food and Drug Administration.

Vaccines save lives. We have heard testimony in our Health Committee demonstrating that. Undermining public confidence in vaccine risks not only our ability to combat COVID–19 but acceptance of other vaccines as well.

If California and New York can override the FDA on vaccines, what would prevent Republican Governors from banning RU–486, the abortion drug, in their States? If that were to happen, I am sure my Democratic colleagues would cry politics and suggest that if FDA has reviewed and approved a drug and said it is safe and effective, then, States should not be able to say that it is unsafe.

FDA is the right agency to review and approve vaccines and drugs and medical devices. I would urge the Governors of California and New York not to set up their State review panels but instead focus their time and resources on planning to distribute the vaccine and improving testing and contract tracing, using the resources that Congress has given to States, rather than second-guessing the efforts of scientists at the Food and Drug Administration.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, well, for more than year and a half, Leader MCCONNELL and Senate Republicans have refused to take action on the House-passed For the People Act at a time when our democracy is under siege in so many ways. The For the People Act is a bold proposal that will restore people's trust in our democratic system, a trust that is fading. It is for the people. In order to make a more perfect Union, it would shore up our elections from threats from abroad. That is something we have just recently read more and more about. Why aren't we doing more on that?

In fact, when Senator VAN HOLLEN, a few days ago, put on the floor a UC of an act that would say Russia should have sanctions imposed on it if they interfere with our elections, the other side blocked it. I hope they are not following Donald Trump's obeisance to Russia and his view that Putin is just OK.

It would also dismantle systematic hurdles that discourage voter participation. One of the worst things the Supreme Court has done—and there are quite a few under this conservative majority—is the Shelby decision, where Justice Roberts, leading the charge, said: We can dismantle the toughest protections under the Voting Rights Act. He said: States aren't going to discriminate anymore.

And within a year, 20 States passed laws making it harder to vote. That is despicable. That is an awful case.

It would help beat back decades of loose finance rules that empowered special interests at the expense of the American people. We all know about the dark money that is cascading into our system. In fact, SHELDON WHITEHOUSE yesterday asked to make that public, to disclose those kinds of contributions when it came to the Supreme Court, where rightwing money pours in to make sure that rightwing nominees get on the Court and move to pull the American agenda so much further to the right than the American people ever would.

Well, in general, there is too much dark money, too much special interest money. This would undo it. As election interference remains an urgent threat, as efforts to disenfranchise voters—especially voters of color, young voters, and low-income voters—persist, and as powerful special interests continue to exercise outside influence in our elections, the need for this legislation couldn't be more clear.

Unfortunately, the Republican leader has other priorities. Rather than strengthen our democracy, rather than protecting our right to vote, rather than fighting big money or tackling corruption, rather than addressing any of the myriad of problems in our democracy that this country faces, Leader MCCONNELL is undoing democracy by rushing through a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court mere days before an election.

You couldn't find a more different set of priorities from that of everyday Americans if you tried. I urge Leader MCCONNELL to stop this unprecedented and nakedly partisan process and instead put this important legislation on the Senate floor for a vote now. Let's discuss it. Let's debate it. Let's not just reject it at a time when we need to do so much of this.

In order to proceed to the consideration of H.R. 1, For the People Act, I