

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

most of the country was unaware of the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was worsening. Cases of the virus and hospitalizations in the United States have been spiking for weeks now. On Saturday, we hit the highest daily total of new cases—126,000 new cases on Saturday. In Illinois, we are approaching half a million cases. The State has tragically seen more than 10,000 of our neighbors and friends die from this COVID-19. The country is on pace to hit 1 million new cases every week by the end of this year.

This is disastrous, and it demands action. Thankfully, President-Elect Biden has announced an extraordinary task force of respected public health and medical experts—truth tellers, real leaders. Like the NIH's Dr. Fauci, I trust Dr. Kessler, David Kessler, whom I have known for decades; Dr. Morita, who served so admirably in the city of Chicago; Dr. Atul Gawande, one of my real heroes in medicine today—I have spent a lot of money on his books and have never regretted a penny of it; and former Surgeon General Murthy—what an extraordinarily talented man he is and the others who are part of the team.

Yet we need to continue to stay safe and remember that this virus is not anywhere near being gone. There are 10 million Americans who have now contracted the virus, and we have lost 238,000 American lives. My heart goes out to everyone who has lost someone in this pandemic and to those who are still suffering due to this virus.

In addition to the health and safety of the American people, we have also been struggling to deal with real economic uncertainty, job losses, food insecurity, stress, and childcare. It is a long list. Despite these urgent needs of families, small businesses, workers, health providers, and unemployed Americans across the country, unfortunately, the leadership in this Chamber has dragged its feet and offered only a few very weak measures that barely address the overwhelming needs of this Nation. This is why Americans have not received another round of economic impact payments, rental assistance, or enhanced unemployment assistance, and it is why hospitals are not receiving additional funding.

Speaker PELOSI and House Democrats passed the Heroes Act in May—a \$3.4 trillion relief package. After negotiating with the White House, they then passed the second version of that—a \$2.2 trillion package. Unfortunately, the Senate majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, refused to consider either of these proposals and even refused to attend the negotiating sessions. The last Senate Republican response was inadequate—\$500 billion. It may seem like a fortune until you look at a nation in the midst of a pandemic and at an economy struggling to survive.

If the Republicans are serious about negotiating a real package—if they want to demonstrate to the American people what leadership looks like, with

real solutions for real problems that families face—then I call on Senator MCCONNELL to show up to the negotiating table and give up these rogue attempts to pass empty, halfhearted measures.

The Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Jerome Powell, a conservative Republican economist, has repeatedly warned of potentially dire economic consequences if additional fiscal relief is delayed. As hiring begins to pick up in a few sectors—thank goodness—too many populations, including African-American workers, Hispanic men, and women with children, are being left behind.

We need to focus on helping the American people through this pandemic. We need to do it now. This is the so-called lameduck session between the results of an election and the swearing-in of a new Congress and President, but shame on us if we don't use this time together in Washington as an opportunity to do more than vote for a random Republican judge. Can't we roll up our sleeves on a bipartisan basis and realize what is really happening across America as this pandemic heats up and more Americans die every day?

We need at least \$75 billion for additional testing and contact tracing to slow the spread of COVID-19—far more than the meager \$16 billion that was offered in the Republican measure.

We also want to put \$57 billion in for hospitals, clinics, and health providers. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was on the phone with these administrators. They are desperate. We are going to lose hospitals across this country and, I fear, maybe even in our own State if we don't step forward and do something.

What is wrong with increasing, at least to some degree, the amount available for food stamps—the so-called SNAP program—so that hundreds of millions of Americans who go to food banks to survive get a helping hand? Is that too much to ask in the month of Thanksgiving and in the month of Christmas?

We must also include more economic support for households through a second round of economic impact payments and through reinstating enhanced unemployment benefits.

I continue to hear about struggles from hospitals that are on the brink, from workers who have lost their jobs, and from small business owners who are desperately trying to keep their heads above water. Unfortunately, the Senate continues to waste time on proposals that place the needs of Big Business ahead of the needs of small families. History will judge this body on how we respond—not on the best speech given on the floor—or on how we failed to respond to the worst pandemic in a century and the deepest recession in 75 years.

The American people are looking for leadership. We cannot let them down.

Madam President, there is another aspect of this that I would like to address for just a moment.

After each Presidential election, there is a transition period when a new President is coming in and his team takes a look at the government as it stands and prepares for the day of January 20, when that new President will be sworn in. All of the networks and major news sources have declared Joe Biden to be the President-elect and KAMALA HARRIS, our colleague here from the Senate, to be the Vice President-elect. They are now bringing together the people who are their experts to prepare for a smooth, orderly transition.

Before that can take place, the Administrator of the General Services Administration must file something called an ascertainment that ascertains in fact there was an election and someone won. In most cases, it is very routine. It is just done automatically based on the reports from the States that we already have as we sat busily by the TV, day after day, doing our emails and texting to friends and families, waiting for the returns to come in. The announcement was made on Saturday, and the reaction was all across the country.

You would think that the Administrator of the GSA would have the ascertainment necessary to really pull the trigger for a transition from the Trump administration to the incoming Biden administration. These are routine things that have gone on in past years without really much controversy. Yet, lo and behold, this year, there is controversy.

For the past 60 years, since Congress passed the Presidential Transition Act to ensure a smooth and orderly transfer of power, the GSA Administrator has usually ascertained the apparent winner within 24 hours of the election. By passing the Presidential Transition Act, Congress has acknowledged how critical this period is for the safety and well-being of the country. Once the GSA makes this ascertainment, the executive branch can provide crucial services to the transition team to make sure there is a smooth transfer.

Remember when I mentioned earlier that we are in the midst of a pandemic, with thousands of people dying? Why would we want to see a delay or some bureaucratic indecision that might jeopardize a person's health or a person's life in the midst of this pandemic?

Once the GSA makes that ascertainment to provide services, it includes access to classified information for incoming national security officials; background investigations and security clearances for potential nominees; State Department-facilitated foreign leader calls; access to SCIFs and Federal agencies for discussions on personnel, budget, and policy; and access

to \$6.3 million of congressionally approved funds to support transition activities and to actually buy office equipment.

Delayed ascertainment, as I mentioned, could also prevent the transition team from meeting with agency officials who will be responsible for the COVID-19 crisis. Shouldn't they get up to speed on Operation Warp Speed and on the announcement today by Pfizer that it is on the verge of announcing a successful vaccine? Don't we want an orderly, peaceful, smooth, effective, and efficient transition when it comes to the manufacturing and distribution of that vaccine? Of course, we do.

A delayed ascertainment will cause major harm to this transition, to the new Biden administration, and to the American people. It could be a danger to our national security. Why would we ever risk that?

On November 27, 2000, when there was an actual controversy in the States and in the courts over 500 or 600 votes in Florida, for example, Vice President-Elect Dick Cheney said about the transition being delayed at all: "We will pay a heavy price for the delays in planning and assembling the next administration."

It has been a bitter campaign, a tough campaign. People still have very strong personal feelings about its outcomes. Some people are euphoric, and others are angry and sad. I know that is natural in an election campaign, and I feel that way about some of the races back in my home State. Yet there comes a moment when we have to look after the best interests of this country, and the best interests of this country say we should move forward on the transition at this moment.

I believe that President-Elect Joe Biden will be sworn in on January 20 as our next President. I believe the numbers are overwhelming. The margins in even the controversial States are so large, they are not likely to be overturned by any recount. Why delay the transition? Why run the risk that we won't have a smooth, orderly, and efficient passage from one administration to the other? Why, in the middle of a pandemic that has killed over 200,000 Americans and will threaten over 100,000 more before January 20, would we ever risk it over some bureaucratic delay? It is just unacceptable.

The American people know the election is over. Now it is time for us in Washington to concede that point. It is time for the Administrator of the GSA to do her job and announce the ascertainment and move forward in an orderly, productive, and smooth transition.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of James Ray Knepp II, of Ohio, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Ohio.

Mitch McConnell, James E. Risch, Joni Ernst, Marsha Blackburn, Mike Crapo, James Lankford, Thom Tillis, Roy Blunt, Roger F. Wicker, Pat Roberts, Mike Rounds, John Cornyn, John Hoeven, Jerry Moran, Lamar Alexander, Mike Braun, David Perdue.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of James Ray Knepp II, of Ohio, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Ohio, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Montana (Mr. DAINES), the Senator from Missouri (Mr. HAWLEY), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN), and the Senator from Indiana (Mr. YOUNG).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Washington (Ms. CANTWELL), the Senator from Maryland (Mr. CARDIN), the Senator from Nevada (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO), the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH), the Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY), the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ), the Senator from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA), and the Senator from Montana (Mr. TESTER) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 62, nays 23, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 225 Ex.]

YEAS—62

Barrasso	Cruz	Lankford
Blackburn	Enzi	Leahy
Blunt	Ernst	Lee
Boozman	Feinstein	Loeffler
Braun	Fischer	Manchin
Brown	Gardner	McConnell
Burr	Graham	McSally
Capito	Grassley	Murkowski
Carper	Hassan	Murphy
Cassidy	Hoeven	Paul
Collins	Hyde-Smith	Perdue
Coons	Inhofe	Peters
Cornyn	Johnson	Portman
Cotton	Jones	Reed
Cramer	Kaine	Risch
Crapo	Kennedy	Roberts

Romney	Scott (SC)	Toomey
Rounds	Shaheen	Warner
Rubio	Shelby	Whitehouse
Sasse	Thune	Wicker
Scott (FL)	Tillis	

NAYS—23

Baldwin	Hirono	Schumer
Bennet	King	Smith
Blumenthal	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Booker	Markey	Udall
Casey	Menendez	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Rosen	Wyden
Gillibrand	Sanders	

NOT VOTING—15

Alexander	Harris	Schatz
Cantwell	Hawley	Sinema
Cardin	Heinrich	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Moran	Tester
Daines	Murray	Young

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). On this vote, the yeas are 62, the nays are 23.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

RECOGNIZING THE WYOMING ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I rise today to recognize a significant anniversary for the Wyoming Association of Conservation Districts. When they meet next week, the association will celebrate 75 years of service to Wyoming's natural resources. Without question, the forests, streams, and soils in the state have seen immense benefit from the important work conservation district employees do every day.

Conservation districts succeed through their work and partnerships with diverse stakeholders. Landowners, farmers and ranchers, government agencies, counties, towns, and other community organizations contribute to the conservation of land and water resources on private and public lands in Wyoming. Local conservation district boards perform as a liaison between local landowners, resource users, and State and Federal governmental agencies. The association helps individuals navigate programs and provides exemplary technical assistance to cultivate productive lands and healthy ecosystems. Agriculture, industry, cities, forests, and wildlife all depend on strong and healthy watersheds.

Wyoming has 34 conservation districts in our 23 counties. Each district is run by staff and a board of five supervisors, who serve voluntarily. Conservation districts direct programs protecting local renewable natural resources at the local level. Each district