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Senate

The Senate met at 11 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.

Eternal Master, we honor You for Your glory and strength. Your glory fills us with reverence, and Your strength inspires us with courage.

Bless our lawmakers. Inspire them to find fulfillment in the splendor of holiness. Lord, remind them that You expect people of faith to illuminate the darkness of this world with exemplary actions that prompt people to glorify You. May our Senators remember that their conduct, particularly during times of adversity, has long-term consequences.

Lord, we praise You that You continue to rule our universe.

We pray in Your awesome 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 (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

31ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE VELVET REVOLUTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, Iowa is home to a lot of people who have a heritage from the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. November 17 is

coming up pretty soon, and it marks the 31st anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia.

In 1989, the Czech people stood up against Communist rule and, through nonviolent demonstrations, precipitated the nation's transition to democracy. The Velvet Revolution lasted 43 days and in the end ended 41 years of Communist control of Czechoslovakia. Jingling keys became a symbol of the revolution and of the new doors that democracy and freedom from communism would unlock for those great people in Czechoslovakia.

Now we have two countries—the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. We also have a National Czech and Slovak Museum in Cedar Rapids, IA. This museum helps to educate Americans about these events I just talked about and, most importantly, to teach them about the importance of never giving up on fighting for freedom.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, last week, the country and the world received some really great news that we have longed for quite a while to hear. A major American drug company, together with its German partner, announced that their candidate for a COVID-19 vaccine appears to be at least 90 percent effective in trials. That is 90 percent—nine zero. Dr. Fauci called these preliminary results extraordinary. Another expert called the news “as good as you could hope for.”

Of course, tests and trials are ongoing. The FDA will perform its own thorough review, which will include analyzing months of safety data. The American people should rest assured

there are appropriate and necessary measures to ensure the safety and efficacy of any vaccine before it is rolled out to the American people, but this will proceed with the lifesaving urgency that is called for.

Right now, COVID-19 is continuing to spread across the country at rates that are not sustainable and which we must try to slow. Yesterday, my home State of Kentucky just logged its highest ever daily total—2,700 new cases. The positivity rate of our tests is the highest since early May.

It is urgent that all Americans continue the smart steps that have gotten us this far: wearing masks, social distancing, adapting our plans and routines. This virus is not going to magically leave us alone if we decide we are fed up with taking precautions, but thank God and thanks to the brilliant scientists, we may look back on this hopeful announcement as the beginning of the end of this terrible ordeal.

I said back in March that our country was about to meet a whole lot of brandnew heroes. Many were going to be doctors and nurses. Others were going to be essential workers who kept society going. Some were going to be the men and women who worked like crazy in labs and research centers until we had this virus beaten. But every single American has a role.

As cases continue to climb, the simple advice—wear a mask, practice social distancing, wash your hands—is now just as important as ever. So, of course, discovering the vaccine will only be a part of the battle. Once one or more candidates have been proven effective and safe, it will be a second Herculean undertaking to scale up production and distribute doses of the vaccine throughout our country. This is why this Senate and the Trump administration have been on the case for months.

As part of the historic CARES Act, we created Operation Warp Speed—a historic effort that combined interagency government work with public-

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



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private partnerships. This was a 21st-century Manhattan Project for a COVID vaccine. We helped fund research and development for several firms. We committed billions of dollars in advance purchase agreements. We flattened regulatory barriers to speed the process. We provided backing so that companies could begin mass-producing vaccine doses before clinical trials had fully concluded so we would have a head start on whichever ones wound up working.

If things stay on track, we hope to have a safe and effective vaccine in a timeframe that will be absolutely historic. President Trump's administration and this Congress should take huge pride in the groundwork we laid.

Now, strangely enough, some are finding it challenging to simply applaud this unambiguous good news. The Democratic Governor of New York opined a few days ago that it was "bad news" that a vaccine breakthrough may have been reached, because President Trump is still in office.

Now, I understand Governor Cuomo has found the time during this pandemic to write and publish a self-congratulatory book on leadership—this, notwithstanding that his own State has been absolutely pummeled by the disease and his own administration intentionally sent thousands of COVID-19 positive patients into vulnerable nursing homes.

The Governor has the temerity to say this vaccine breakthrough is partially "bad news"—partially "bad news"?—because it occurred under the Trump administration. He gestured vaguely toward unspecified concerns about distribution. I guess he would have preferred the lifesaving breakthroughs to have been delayed longer, with more American deaths in the meantime.

The irony, as our colleague the Senator from Tennessee has pointed out, is that the plans that are in place put States in the driver's seat for arranging distribution and making sure the most vulnerable citizens receive access. The Federal Government is there to provide guidance and support. As Senator ALEXANDER said, the Governor of New York might want to devote more time and attention to developing this crucial plan rather than undermining public confidence for the sake of politics.

Sadly, this isn't anything new. Just a few weeks ago, the Democratic Governors of both New York and California both began openly second-guessing the Food and Drug Administration and doubting its ability to assess the safety of a vaccine. There were suggestions that blue States may set up their own State review boards and then withhold lifesaving vaccines from their own people for who knows how long until this extra obstacle had been hurdled. This is where they are. Vaccines aren't vaccines if a Republican is President until New York and California reinvent their own miniature FDAs.

To be clear, Americans purchase nearly 4 billion prescriptions every sin-

gle year—4 billion prescriptions—trusting the expertise and professionalism of the FDA. That is the trusted authority. Nobody is crying out for liberal Governors to add their own Good Housekeeping seal of approval, let alone potentially delaying the end of COVID-19 to do so.

If this vaccine proves to be the one, citizens in New York and California should not have it withheld from them because their Governors care more about performatively opposing President Trump than about hard science. This reminds me of when the junior Senator from California declared back in September, during her Vice Presidential campaign, that she might hesitate to trust a vaccine.

The whole country understands that our Democratic friends are not charter members of the Donald Trump fan club. We know that. They do not need to dabble in the early stages of antivax conspiracy theories to prove it. In fact, for the sake of public health and public confidence and saving lives, they have a moral obligation to stop.

If a vaccine has been found and distribution can begin soon, that is good news, not bad news. It would be a major victory for our country and the world, fueled by American innovation and aided by Operation Warp Speed, thanks to this Senate and the Trump administration. It would save thousands and thousands of American lives, and public confidence will be essential.

So this is where we are. Leaders on all sides have a duty to act accordingly.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Aileen Mercedes Cannon, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida.

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

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

2020 ELECTIONS

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, yesterday, we came together as a country—not as Republicans, not as Democrats or Independents, but as Americans—to recognize the service and sacrifice of our veterans, men and women who served in uniform to protect our country and to defend our democracy.

The ongoing attacks that President Trump has launched on our democracy are an insult to those who have sacrificed so much to defend, and so too is the complicity of so many Republican Senators right here in this body, who through their silence or active incitement are spreading Donald Trump's absurd false narrative that he won the election.

Each of us—each of us in this body—has sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States, to stand up for our democracy, and to support the peaceful transfer of power established there. My colleagues, it is time for every Senator to do your sworn duty and stand up for the Constitution and for our democracy.

Make no mistake, on January 20, Joe Biden will be sworn in as the next President of the United States and KAMALA HARRIS will be sworn in as the next Vice President of the United States. But that does not mean that what Donald Trump is doing now is harmless. That does not mean that the silence or active complicity of so many Republican Senators is harmless. It is downright dangerous to the health of our democracy and to our national security interests.

We have enough challenges protecting our democracy from foreign enemies and foreign adversaries who seek every day to undermine faith and confidence in democratic institutions here in the United States and in other democracies around the world. The last thing we need is for people to attack that confidence from within the United States. This is doing harm in the short term and the long term to our national security, putting us at risk.

In the short term, we are seeing a very dangerous purge of top national security officials at the Defense Department and other places. These are officials with whom I have many policy differences, but they are competent managers and qualified individuals. And what you are seeing this President do in the death throes of his administration is purging those qualified individuals and replacing them with people whose only credential is loyalty to President Trump, and replacing competent, qualified individuals with political lackeys. That is dangerous at any time. It is especially dangerous to mess around with the top leadership of our national security agencies during a transition to power.

That is what the 9/11 Commission told us. Yet what you are seeing President Trump do is play with matches when it comes to our national security