

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

and to put personal political peeves above the national security interests of the United States.

In addition to purging individuals from some of our top national security agencies, the President is prohibiting the government of the United States, which belongs to the people of the United States, from providing daily intelligence briefings and other intelligence briefings to the incoming President, President-Elect Joe Biden.

Now, we all know that President Trump has been notorious for not being interested in those intelligence briefings, but I think that for all of us who know Joe Biden from the time he served as Senator and Vice President, we know he takes these things seriously and he takes threats that might be learned through those intelligence briefings seriously. To deny the next President of the United States access to those briefings, which is part of the tradition and part of the rules that we developed to ensure steady transfer and making sure the next President has the information needed on day one, that is outright grossly negligent when it comes to our national security. It is time for our Senate Republican colleagues to be speaking out loudly about that.

That, of course, is part of the consequence of the fact that the General Services Administration has been unwilling to provide the traditional funds to support the peaceful transfer of power. This is another gross abuse of the government, which belongs to the people of the United States, not to Donald Trump.

In addition, you have the Secretary of State, Secretary Pompeo, instructing the Department of State not to pass along messages from foreign leaders to the next President of the United States, President-Elect Joe Biden. This is, again, another gross abuse of power. And, of course, Secretary Pompeo undermined this faith in our transition of democracy himself when he talked about the fact that we are transitioning to the second Trump term.

This is the person—this is the individual—who is supposed to represent the United States of America overseas, the person who is supposed to stand up for our democracy, and yet, here, at home he is undermining faith in that democracy. And who does that give any comfort to? Our adversaries and enemies abroad, people who want our democracy to fail.

I don't know if our Republican colleagues have noticed who has congratulated the President-Elect Joe Biden and who has not among foreign leaders. Well, our democratic allies around the world have congratulated the next President of the United States, Joe Biden. The United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada—the leaders of democratic governments and countries have all acknowledged that our democracy is working and that they are recognizing the next President of the United States.

Who has refused, so far, to congratulate the next President of the United States, Joe Biden? Vladimir Putin, President Xi, and the leader of North Korea. What President Trump is doing and what our Republican colleagues are doing by their silence is aiding and abetting these authoritarian leaders. These guys are smiling. If you are an authoritarian leader, you want nothing more than to see democracy fail—to see that model fail. These are leaders who often have their own sort of election facades, where they pretend to have a free and fair election, and then it turns out to be 90 percent for them. They are smiling at what is happening here.

So I hope our Republican Senate colleagues are looking at the company they are keeping among foreign leaders who are watching us, because the leaders of our democratic friends and allied countries have all recognized the outcome of this election, and it is the leaders of Russia, China, North Korea, and others who have not. That is the company that is being kept by so many Republican Senators today. And that is going to do ongoing damage to our ability around the world, as the world's oldest democracy, to stand up for the interests of liberty, freedom, and democracy.

I fear that that is not even the most damaging thing that has happened as a result of this fraud that is being perpetrated on the American people. The biggest danger is undermining the confidence of the American people themselves, or large numbers of the American people, in the outcome of this election, seeding this false narrative that somehow Donald Trump was actually the winner and that Joe Biden was somehow an illegitimate President-to-be.

If you look at the recent polling in the last 48 hours, what you find is that 70 percent of Republicans believe this was not a clear and fair election. That is two times as many as before the election, and that is when Donald Trump was telling everybody that, if he lost, it meant the election was rigged.

Are we really, through our silence or sometimes encouragement, going to seed the idea that because Donald Trump lost the election it was rigged? All you have to look at is the frivolous claims being made in courts around the United States and the reaction to those claims by judges, appointed by Democrats and Republicans alike, to realize what a charade this is.

Joe Biden, as a candidate, has said he wants to bring the country together. He and KAMALA HARRIS want to find a way to bring us together to find common ground. And he is looking for the opportunity to work on both sides of the aisle here in the U.S. Senate and in the House of Representatives to address urgent matters before our country.

So I ask my Republican Senate colleagues: How are you going to take the

extended hand of Joe Biden when you are telling so many of your constituents back at home that this is an illegitimate election? How are you going to do that?

What we have seen in the aftermath of this election is scary because we saw so many times over the last 4 years that our Republican Senate colleagues refused to stand up to the abuse of power of this administration, things that if the Obama administration ever thought of doing, they would be out there every day crying foul and abuse of power. But everybody enabled that conduct. And now, after the election, when Joe Biden was already 5 million votes ahead in the national vote and winning the electoral college, you would think this is a moment for everybody to come together to give the next President of the United States a chance.

I think the scary thing of what this shows is that the Republican Party has become the party of Donald Trump. I just urge my colleagues to think about the consequences of feeding into this fraud that Donald Trump was actually the one who was elected, because what you will be saying there to the 72 million Americans who voted for Donald Trump is that he is, in fact, the rightful President, and he will therefore also continue to call the shots within the Republican Party. He is doing that now, even after he has lost an election. So I just urge my colleagues to think about what they are doing each day that goes by that reinforces this false and fraudulent claim—how it is harming our democracy, how it is harming our national security, how it is going to impede Joe Biden's ability to reach out to our Republican colleagues. It is not because he doesn't want to—he does—but because you will have undermined your ability to do it by telling tens and millions of Americans that somehow this was an illegitimate election.

I ask, I implore my colleagues to think more about this as every hour goes by, because every hour that this lie continues and persists is another hour that you are harming the health of our democracy and our country.

Thank you.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to conclude my remarks and that the Senator from Minnesota be able to conclude her remarks prior to the vote.

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

IMPACT AID CORONAVIRUS RELIEF ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this summer, Senator SMITH and I introduced the Impact Aid Coronavirus Relief Act. If enacted, this bill would provide much needed relief to school districts participating in the Impact Aid Program. And given the many other