

but which is certainly being considered in the House of Representatives today.

The reason this is so important to emphasize today is that in this legislation will be the Coast Guard bill and recognition of the fact that we truly are an Arctic nation.

Well, some of you may have said: Well, I think we already got geography; we knew we were an Arctic nation. But this is the first time that we will be authorizing a fleet of six icebreakers for the United States of America.

Some people think: Well, why is that important? What is so important about icebreakers? Well, certainly to the Northwest Passage and the ability to move cargo and to move people and to new transportation routes, it is very important.

When you look at where we are in the United States of America with an icebreaking fleet, we don't compete with other nations that have been able to access and transverse those waterways because they have somebody who can clean the waterway and make it safe and secure. That is why we need, in the United States, to have an icebreaking fleet beyond the capacity we have today, which is two vessels but basically not the full capacity of those two vessels.

This is why it is so important for us to put the money and investment into a program to get us icebreakers so that we, too, can look at this northern waterway and passage and say to the United States of America and to the world community: Yes, we will be in the Arctic as well.

My colleagues on both sides of the aisle realize that this is a very bipartisan issue, that it is a national security issue, and that it is an environmental issue. It is about us and making sure that we communicate.

I have also supported additional language about an Arctic shipping Federal advisory committee. A committee made up of representatives from Federal agencies, including the Coast Guard and the Department of Defense, the Secretary of Transportation, and others would be part of a process to ensure that our Arctic efforts are better coordinated and impactful.

So I hope that my colleagues will look favorably on this legislation.

We all know how important the Coast Guard is to our Nation and an example of that icebreaking capacity, but there are other aspects of this Coast Guard bill that we are also proud of—making sure that it works more robustly with fishermen on fishing safety; doing more to examine the impacts of tar sands; making sure that our orca population is saved from noise impact and further reducing that impact on our orca population; and instituting new reforms within the Coast Guard to really help empower women, to make significant investment in the 40 percent of the workforce of the Coast Guard that are women and to make sure they have what they need—vital childcare opportunities for Coast

Guard families—and to make sure there is zero tolerance in the approach for any kind of sexual assault or sexual harassment.

So with these improvements over all, I would like to thank Chairman WICKER, Senator SULLIVAN, and Senator MARKEY for working on all of these issues. I want to thank Senator MURKOWSKI, as I said, for the Arctic Shipping Federal Advisory Committee and many people who are helping us get to this point, to say not only do we recognize geographically we are an Arctic nation, but we are going to do something about it by making sure we have the capacity on this waterway to be heard and seen and to help the commerce that is going to emerge from the new developments in the Arctic.

I yield the floor.

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. LANKFORD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### CORONAVIRUS

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, four different times in the last 4 months, we have had votes on this floor to talk about COVID relief. There is a real need to be able to give relief to a lot of people in my State, and, quite frankly, in States around the country.

There are individual items that need to be done that are unfinished. I think we need to actually finish them. We have this week and next week to finish the task at hand. We have 12 appropriations bills. We have a national defense authorization. But in my State, people want to know most what is going to happen with COVID relief. Where is that going to go?

Well, apparently, now we can actually have the debate. After the election was over, Speaker PELOSI announced that she was ready to actually negotiate the bill now that the election was finished. Well, great. Folks in my State have actually been waiting because four times in the last 4 months we brought up bills that were serious bills to be able to actually debate this out and to get the aid that is needed to be done, starting with additional money for distribution for vaccines.

The first vaccine will come on market by this Friday. It will be in arms by this weekend or at the latest, Monday, in my State, in Oklahoma.

As I visit with the people in my State who are in charge of the distribution, they have a terrific plan that they are engaged in to work with healthcare providers across the State to give them first access. For these folks who have been living in PPE for months and months and months, to now have the opportunity to get a vaccine will be a tremendous gift to them. It is incredibly important that this happen.

I do want to congratulate the folks in the science community, the folks who are at Operation Warp Speed in the White House, and so many other individuals who worked so incredibly hard to take a vaccine from first identification of the virus to a vaccine in 11 months. That is remarkable speed to get something done, though I have read recently that the New York Times is now putting out this quiet little accusation that the Trump administration didn't buy enough of the Pfizer vaccine, and the rest of the world is going to get it. The Times just conveniently leaves out that the administration actually purchased 700 million doses of the vaccine from multiple different manufacturers very early on, taking the appropriate risk to say that we don't know which one is going to be successful, so let's try to purchase from all of them, not knowing if six of them will be successful or if one of them will be successful. It was the right strategy then. It remains the right strategy.

In addition to the fact that the Pfizer vaccine is coming out first—which we are all very grateful for—it is 95 percent accurate as far as setting aside the virus. It is 100 percent effective against severe outbreaks of the virus. It is a remarkable vaccine, but it has to be stored at negative 70 degrees. There are very few places in my State and in many other States that have an ultracold freezer that maintains that. It is a great vaccine, but it is limited in the way that you can actually distribute it quickly.

There is a Moderna vaccine that is coming a week later that we will actually have twice as much of, but it doesn't require the same ultracold storage.

So this first round of vaccines will be coming to my State by this weekend, another round of vaccines from another manufacturer by next weekend, and by the end of this year—in just the next few weeks—we will have 20 million people who will get vaccinated.

That is a great start, but, clearly, there are another 300 million people to go. By the time that we get to the end of February, we will have 100 million people who will have been vaccinated, and that doesn't even count the additional vaccines that are coming online.

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a single-dose vaccine. It should be online in February. That is very significant to us because that will also provide us tens of millions of additional individuals who can be vaccinated. We could very well be completely vaccinated as a country by the time we get to this summer. We could be completely vaccinated with the most vulnerable in our population—everyone in our healthcare, every single nursing home, every single skilled nursing, every single assisted living, and all those with high-risk conditions like Parkinson's and Alzheimer's and individuals with diabetes and heart disease—those individuals could be completely vaccinated

by the time we get to February. That is just 2 months away. We are finally getting close.

But we do need some additional dollars set aside for the distribution to actually get to that point. We need additional dollars for testing. We have done 200 million tests on COVID-19. I have had several of those. Most everyone in this Chamber has had several. Most everyone across my State has had several to evaluate them. I always tested negative. I am grateful for that. There are many people who still continue to get that testing. We need to continue that.

We have individuals across my State and across all of our States who need access to the Paycheck Protection Program. This was a risk that we took in March to try an assistance for individuals in a completely different way, knowing that the unemployment assistance in all of our States is antiquated and would be overrun by individuals. There had to be another way to sustain individuals who would be unemployed and to sustain small businesses to not go out of business as we go through this.

What we created was something called the Paycheck Protection Program. I was honored to be a part of that small group who helped write this and dream it out. It was for small businesses and not-for-profits, and for the first time ever, included faith-based not-for-profits, knowing many of them are key safety nets in our communities across the country. We could not lose that safety net during the time of the pandemic.

I have had individuals who have asked me over and over again for two key things in the Paycheck Protection Program: No. 1, please make it clear how to get final forgiveness to close this out. There are literally millions of small businesses that have a paycheck protection loan. They want to get forgiven, but the process of going through forgiveness is so complicated they are struggling with closing that out. They want to get it done.

There is an easy way to do it that KEVIN CRAMER has actually coordinated and led in this body. Senator CRAMER's work has been remarkable and tenacious to help guide us to a simple solution to get to individuals and businesses that took out loans of \$150,000 or less, to get forgiveness for that in a simple process, in a single-page attestation to be able to do that. That needs to be included in whatever we are doing.

We need to have a second round for those businesses that are the hardest hit.

Let me tell you an example of that. I had a business leader of a small business in my State just yesterday, and this is part of his email. He said: It sounds like there is a chance for another relief bill. I hope that is true. We are expecting—our sales have fallen through the floor again. With the change in weather and rising case counts, we have lost over 50 percent

year over year, and I hear the same from many of my counterparts. It is highly likely we will have to go through another round of furloughs in January. Honestly, it would probably make sense now, but we are not going to do that to anyone through the holidays. We are hoping for some assistance to keep people on payroll and benefits. At worst case, if there is no relief for us, I hope there is additional unemployment coming so people aren't destitute. It may be April before we are able to support our business based on our own revenue.

These comments are not uncommon from many others I have received. They can make this and have a viable business but just not in this kind of environment right now.

What are we going to do about that? Well, I have recommended not only the attestation for forgiveness for small businesses but also a second round to allow those who have been through the small business Paycheck Protection Program to go through it again and get a second bite of that apple short term for the hardest hit businesses and also to allow some of those businesses that are legitimate small businesses to actually get a first shot.

Many people don't know that not-for-profits, including faith-based not-for-profits and small businesses, all got access to the Paycheck Protection Program if you were supported by donors or by a bank or credit union. But if your business was organized by private equity, and that was your original capital, you couldn't get access to the Paycheck Protection Program. So thousands and thousands of small businesses were out simply based on where they got their original capital from to open their business. That is not right.

When we have the second round of paycheck protection, we should at least allow some of those other small businesses to get a first round through this process. We need to continue what we are doing for not-for-profits.

Our safety nets are very clear in America. Our families are our first safety net; our second safety net is our not-for-profits; and our third safety net is government—State, local, and Federal. That second safety net that is out there that is so important in our communities, we need to do what we can to support them.

In the CARES Act, I helped put in a provision there that would give every American a \$300 deduction on their taxes above the line, even if they don't itemize their taxes. They can get a \$300 straight deduction from their taxes if they will give to a nonprofit. They can pick any nonprofit they want to give to—the arts community, the homeless community, those that are helping with mental health, those that are helping with food programs, churches, synagogues, mosques. They can choose any nonprofit they want to. If they give to a nonprofit, every single American gets a deduction up to \$300. That counts for this year. I would encourage

Americans to take advantage of that. Nonprofits around the country desperately need assistance right now.

What we have written into a proposal is to double that for next year for individuals, \$600, or for a couple filing jointly, \$1,200. You could write off your taxes completely, even if you don't itemize, if you would donate that amount to a not-for-profit.

What would cause that? Philosophically, for me, it is a couple of things. I believe in the power and strength and efficiencies of not-for-profits. In small towns around my State and around the country, there are local not-for-profits and churches and faith-based institutions, and they are doing the work to help the hurting and hungry and homeless. We should support them. They are in real need right now of our support.

There are groups all around our Nation that need people to step up and walk alongside them as they walk alongside the neediest in our communities. The best way we can do that is to incentivize that with taxes. We can either say we could have a larger tax piece here or encourage people to actually give locally. I think that is an efficient way to help people.

We need to step up, as my friend who had emailed me yesterday reminded me. If we can't get the paycheck protection extension done—and I hope we can—we need to make sure the unemployment extension is done because we are going to have more people on unemployment. We should really do both.

We can extend paycheck protections to protect those individuals in those businesses and secure them, but we also need to secure our unemployment assistance program. We have many folks with diabetes and other healthcare needs who can't return to work right now. They are not in a position where they can telework, and they need the opportunity to be sustained. Literally, their benefits are running out in days.

This is a moment we should extend that out for multiple more months to allow them the gap they need to get through the pandemic to be able to get a vaccine—which is coming soon—and then to get back to work as they have been dying to do.

We need to get liability protections. A lot of people have a lot of uncertainty, and they are worried about lawsuits coming down on them. They don't know how to manage around them.

I have letters from small businesses, large businesses, and university presidents in my State who are all saying the same thing: Help us just know what the rules of the game are going to be because there is litigation coming at us, and we don't know how to evaluate this because this has never been done before. Help us just know the rules of the road on liability.

That is not an unreasonable request for every university, large and small businesses across our Nation. Schools are going to need some additional help. That is based on just that child, no

matter where they attend—public, private, faith-based, charter, whatever it may be—it is a child whose parent is a taxpayer. Education is important, and they should all be treated the same.

Childcare issues are at the top of the list as well. Childcare facilities are out there in desperate need right now and are open and functioning. They can't have the worker or job ratio they used to have, but the costs are still the same. We need to get additional flexibility to our States. In my State—many entities within my State still have additional dollars left over from the CARES Act. So \$1.5 billion came to the State of Oklahoma through the CARES Act. That is an enormous amount of money. They are still working through to be able to handle it efficiently, how they are going to manage that. Thankfully, most towns in my State have had sales tax revenue that has gone up this year. That is not true for all of it, but for many of them, it has been. Their expenses have also gone up.

So the challenge at this point would be, how can we get the States maximum flexibility with the dollars they have to make sure they don't have to squander those funds quickly just to be able to get it done because the deadline to use them is December 31? More flexibility would be a good gift both to do wise spending and to be able to give them greater flexibility in the days ahead. That would be for States, counties, cities, and Tribes.

We should allow for the reprogramming of funds. Interestingly enough, the Paycheck Protection Program had about \$130 billion left over in it when it expired. We all gave it a lot of money not knowing how much would be needed for small businesses, but the vast majority of small businesses that could take it were able to take it. There are many, as I mentioned before, that are wanting to do a second round with it. The best way to do that is to reprogram the unused funds that are there. That would be more efficient. The Federal Reserve has unused funds in the hundreds of billions of dollars. We should cancel out those programs and reuse those funds. That is a wise use of funds to make sure we are not squandering American tax dollars.

Every single dollar that is spent on COVID-19 right now is debt money. So we should pay attention to all of those issues of debt money, knowing that we need to be careful with other people's money.

There are things that we need to do in the next 10 days here as well as to have conversations in private and in public, like this, to say: Let's get it done. Let's finish the tasks that we need to get done.

#### TRIBUTE TO CORY GARDNER

Madam President, I would like to take one moment of personal privilege.

About an hour ago, while sitting in this chair behind me, I had the opportunity to listen to a friend speak on the Senate floor for the last time, my friend CORY GARDNER.

CORY GARDNER and I came to the House of Representatives together in 2011. We became fast friends for his winning smile and his tenacious work ethic. He is a solid guy for whom I have great respect. We came to the Senate together at the same time as well. We served 4 years in the House together and now have served 6 years in the Senate together. He just lost his election in November, and he will be heading back to Colorado. I will miss my friend.

CORY and I had a lot of great conversations about a lot of legislation. We had a lot of conversations about our families. During the times that we would occasionally sit side by side in Bible studies here, we had lots of time to talk. I will not forget one key moment, though. It was our first day in the U.S. Senate, in this Chamber, when one of the staff approached us and said: The two of you have the same number of years in the House of Representatives, and you are both coming in from the same class to the Senate, which means you are tied for seniority in the Senate, and your seniority has to be resolved by a coin toss.

So CORY and I stood there, side by side, while we flipped a coin. I won, and I rubbed it in to him for 6 years that I had seniority over him in the U.S. Senate.

As I sat and listened to him speak for the last time today and talk about patriotism and his incredible love for his State and his country, all I could think of was, this is the guy I have seniority over, my friend, whom I will miss here.

CORY, thank you for being a great servant of the people of Colorado and a fantastic workaholic, happy warrior Senator.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

#### NOMINATION OF NATHAN A. SIMINGTON

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, in just a few moments, we will vote on the nomination of Nathan Simington to be a member of the Federal Communications Commission. We will do so in the middle of a pandemic when this agency is of more importance than ever to students, businesses, and families who are vitally dependent on broadband, on the consumer protection that this agency provides, and to net neutrality, which is a vital issue for them and for our country.

“Nathan Simington” is not exactly a household word, but his name and his presence on the FCC will have important meaning to households around the Nation; nor is the “FCC” a household word, but it, too, affects literally hundreds of millions of households. The FCC will have an increasingly important role in this Nation as we conquer the pandemic and deal with the economic crisis that faces this Nation.

There are 15 to 16 million students who are locked out of the internet because of the unavailability of broadband connectivity or devices that make the internet real in their lives.

The FCC is the key to their participating in schools, and it is the key to businesses being able to communicate with customers. The FCC is at the crossroads of making rights real. Nathan Simington is dangerous to those rights and to the FCC at this moment in history.

Why is he the nominee? The answer is that the current FCC Commissioner, Michael O'Rielly, was originally nominated for another term, and the Commerce Committee even held a vote for him in July. Yet, after Twitter and Facebook had the temerity to label Donald Trump's misinformation about voting and COVID-19, the President issued an Executive order that had the simple purpose of retaliating against these social media platforms. The President, in effect, demanded that the FCC revise section 230 of the Communications Decency Act in order to punish those companies for the mild inconvenience of a fact check. They didn't take down his posts; they said they needed to fact check them.

Commissioner O'Rielly recognized the dangers and the potential illegality of the President's Executive order. Again, he had the temerity to speak up and tell the American public on C-SPAN that he had “deep reservations” if they, meaning Congress, “provided any additional authority for the FCC in this matter.” In a later speech, he appeared to challenge the order on First Amendment grounds, which it well-deserved, in fact, because it potentially violated the First Amendment.

Despite years of a pristine record of Republican positions, this objection now was disqualifying to Commissioner O'Rielly in the view of the White House. The President pulled his nomination and substituted Mr. Simington, who was well qualified, for he had auditioned for the role of doing the President's bidding. We know Mr. Simington tried to pressure the FCC to cave in to the White House and to rightwing media outlets on this very issue, section 230. It is an unprecedented assault on the integrity and independence of the FCC, and he was clearly the White House's wingman on this issue.

Very simply, Nathan Simington is the wrong person and is clearly the wrong person at the wrong time for the FCC. He is unprepared and unqualified. Last month, before the Senate Commerce Committee, he was asked about his plan for the FCC. He couldn't provide one single measure for which he would advocate. He couldn't answer even basic questions from Democrats and Republicans. His answers were inadequate, incomplete, and evasive. I asked him again, in the questions for the record, to say three steps that he would take to provide and prepare for those millions of students who are out of the classroom and lack connectivity to the internet, which now is like lacking connection to the classroom. A student without that connectivity is, in effect, barred from the classroom. He