

Pat Roberts, Cory Gardner, Lindsey Graham, Todd Young, Marco Rubio, John Boozman, John Barrasso.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 5014

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk due a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 5014) to amend title 31, United States Code, to provide for automatic continuing resolutions.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this week, the Senate returns with precious little time left to finish important matters of business. Last week, both Houses of Congress passed the annual Defense bill with veto-proof majorities. If President Trump takes the rather ridiculous step of vetoing a pay raise for our troops in order to defend the honor of dead Confederate traitors—or whatever other contrived grounds he comes up with—Congress must override that veto.

On Friday, both Chambers of Congress also passed a 1-week continuing resolution, giving us until the end of this week to finish an omnibus appropriations bill to fund the government. As usual, the appropriations bill will include several important pieces of related legislation. One that doesn't get enough attention is a bipartisan energy bill.

Earlier this year, during the debate over the Energy bill, Senate Democrats

insisted that a provision to reduce HFCs—a very harmful greenhouse gas that is driving our climate change problem—must be included in the bill. Unfortunately, we had to hold up the bill until a bipartisan agreement could be reached on this critical provision, which would be the single biggest victory in the fight against climate change to pass this body in a decade.

Today, I am very happy to report that we have made very good progress toward an agreement on HFC reduction. We are about to get it done. That is one of the biggest victories to fight global warming in a very long time.

I want to thank Senators CARPER, KENNEDY, and BARRASSO. They have worked very diligently and very hard to craft a compromise.

Finally, as we all know, it is imperative we pass another round of emergency Federal relief from the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, the bipartisan group of Senators who have been diligently working toward an agreement will announce the results of their work: a package of over \$900 billion that includes an agreement on assistance to State and local government. Notably, there is no agreement on corporate immunity. We look forward to reviewing their work. Democrats remain 100 percent committed to getting another round of emergency relief to the American people before the end of the year and in a robust, bold way because America needs it so badly.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, a year that was full of bad news for the country is coming to an end with some very good news. Over the past 8 to 9 months, American scientists, biochemists, and researchers rushed to produce a safe and effective vaccine to the COVID-19 pandemic—and they have succeeded in extraordinary fashion.

We don't have just one but several candidates for a vaccine, each of which has shown to be 90 percent effective in clinical trials. One of those vaccines has been approved, authorized by the FDA for emergency use. And as we speak, an assembly line of workers in masks, gloves, and face shields are pulling doses out of the freezer, loading them into cold storage palettes, and onto trucks to be shipped to States across the country.

The discovery of a COVID-19 vaccine within the timeframe of a calendar year is a crowning scientific achievement of the 21st century. It should bring not only a feeling of relief to the country—indeed, to the entire world—but also deep admiration and pride for America's scientists and our medical workers.

I remember, in the early days of the pandemic, going to the window of our Brooklyn apartment each night to applaud our frontline workers. The whoops, claps, and metallic clang of pots and pans echoed for miles. Our

medical researchers—as well as thousands of Americans who selflessly volunteered for clinical trials—deserve the same national expression of gratitude.

We can show our gratitude here in Congress by communicating clearly that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe, effective, and that every American should inoculate themselves when it becomes available. Skepticism about vaccines was already too high before the pandemic. Several polls have shown it to be an alarming concern with respect to the COVID-19 vaccine. It is an absolute disgrace that the Republican majority on the Homeland Security Committee has invited a prominent skeptic of the COVID-19 vaccine to deliver testimony in a hearing this week. Public figures at all levels should be building up confidence in a vaccine, not giving a platform to those who undermine it.

At the moment, the vaccine is being distributed to medical personnel, doctors, nurses, frontline workers, and the most vulnerable populations. I myself will take the vaccine as soon as it is appropriate and recommended. I will not skip the line. But make no mistake, we should all lead by example, commit to taking the vaccine, and tell our constituents to take it as well.

The CDC and our States will continue to advise which populations should be inoculated based on availability, and we will follow that guidance.

ELECTORAL COLLEGE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now one other note—today, members of the electoral college are gathering in all 50 States and the District of Columbia to formally select Joe Biden as the next President of the United States of America.

Typically, the meeting of the electoral college is merely a formality. The Presidential election took place over a month ago. The result is not in doubt. In almost any other year, both major parties would have fully and publicly accepted the will of the American people by now—the peaceful passing of the torch, a hallmark of our grand democracy. But this year, it seems as if Joe Biden has had to be declared the winner of the Presidential election again and again and again—and still, our Republican colleagues have not fully come to grips with that reality. Just how many times does President Trump have to lose before rank-and-file Republicans—before most Senators—acknowledge that Joe Biden will be the next President of the United States?

Last week, more than 100 Republican Members of the House of Representatives signed their names to a lawsuit that would invalidate the results of the election in four swing States. For any serious person, much less a Member of the U.S. Congress, to sign their name to such an anti-democratic document is beyond shameful.

To my knowledge, the Republican leader of the Senate still has not referred to Joe Biden as President-elect. Will he change his tune now that the electoral college has once again confirmed his victory? Will the rest of my Republican Senate colleagues do the same?

After no evidence of widespread voter fraud was found in the country, after State election officials corroborated the accuracy of the results in every State in the country, after the Trump campaign's legal team racked up an astonishing win-loss record of 1 and 59, after the Supreme Court summarily dismissed two ludicrous efforts by Republicans to invalidate the results in swing States, will the Republican Party in Congress, here in the Senate, finally acknowledge the results of an election that was determined over a month ago?

Just how long are Republicans going to keep up this charade, which has become a national embarrassment? Even now, the Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee is planning to hold a hearing this week about what he calls "election irregularities."

Look, our Republican colleagues don't have to like the results of the election, but they have a solemn responsibility to accept them. They have a duty to confer legitimacy on them. Instead, for the past month, they have given President Trump the space to promote wild conspiracy theories about election fraud and poison Americans' faith in our democracy.

As the electoral college casts the majority of its votes for Joe Biden—the same number of votes that President Trump called a landslide 4 years ago—our Republican colleagues must do now what they should have done a month ago: Accept the legitimacy of Joe Biden's election to the Presidency of the United States.

I yield the floor.

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 Thomas L. Kirsch II, of Indiana, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Seventh Circuit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as we all know by now, late Friday evening, the world received the news that we have been waiting, hoping, and praying for since March. The first COVID-19 vaccine was approved here in the United States. The vaccine was developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech and was found to be 95 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 during clinical trials—extensive clinical trials.

The leaders of Operation Warp Speed immediately mobilized the distribution plan, and the first doses of the vaccine are arriving at healthcare facilities across the country today. Texas's initial shipment of nearly 225,000 doses will be administered to our healthcare workers this week by our healthcare workers, and we will provide these heroes with the protection they need to continue their fight on our behalf on the frontlines.

This is a turning point in our war against COVID, and the significance of this victory in such an expedited time-frame cannot be overstated. I want to thank the brilliant men and women who made this feat possible. There are the researchers and scientists who developed the lifesaving vaccine, as well as the volunteers who participated in clinical trials. There are the manufacturers that are rapidly producing millions of doses and distributors who are getting those doses to sites across the country as quickly as possible. Of course, there are the hospitals, pharmacies, and our incredible healthcare workers who will lead the vaccine effort. The race to a COVID vaccine will be remembered as one of the greatest human achievements of our generation, and these brave and brilliant individuals helped make it possible.

I want to remind all of us that while this is a huge milestone and one that should absolutely be celebrated, we are not out of the dark yet. The light at the end of the tunnel is getting bigger and brighter, but we still have a ways to go, and each of us has our own part to play in getting us there. For the American people, that means stopping the spread through the same habits that we learned all year—washing your hands, wearing a mask, practicing social distancing, and taking extra care to protect our most vulnerable friends and neighbors. Of course, this holiday season is not a time to forget the habits we built over the last several months but to double down on them.

While this is a development to be celebrated and a day we have been looking for for a long time, Congress has not yet done its job. For months on end, the American people have asked for additional financial support to weather this storm, and so far we have not seen any progress. Our Democratic colleagues blocked bill after bill, saying more of the words of Speaker PELOSI: Nothing is better than something.

Well, our Democratic colleagues stood in the way of investing more in vaccine distribution, extending unemployment insurance benefits, helping our small businesses keep their workers on payroll, and giving our schools the resources they need in order to provide education to our students safely. Our Democratic colleagues didn't block these bills because they disagree with the content of the bills; they simply refuse to engage if we do not concede to their controversial and outrageous demands.

At first, Democrats refused to back off the completely absurd bill passed in the House called the Heroes Act, which includes things like diversity studies for the marijuana industry and tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires. While they eventually realized how unrealistic their position was, they now stand firm in providing a bailout for cities and States that have been—some of which have been grossly mismanaged for decades.

Over the last several months, our Democratic colleagues have repeatedly blocked legislation that would have poured half a trillion dollars more into our fight against COVID-19 because it didn't include their far-fetched, partisan priorities. Our Democratic colleagues have wasted a lot of time in playing games with this pandemic relief, and the clock on this Congress is quickly running out. Congress needs to pass another bill this week, and I encourage our Democratic colleagues to start compromising and quit the grandstanding. They have shown us time and again, when you sit down at the negotiating table with an all-or-nothing attitude, the result is always nothing, and that is all they have to show for their obstruction over the last months since we passed the CARES Act.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, on another topic, last Friday, another important thing happened—the Senate passed the National Defense Authorization Act with broad bipartisan support and sent it to the President for his signature. This marks the 60th year in a row that we have completed the defense spending bill, and that is as it should be. Our national security is the No. 1 priority here in Washington, DC, and for our entire Nation.

Texas servicemembers will receive higher salaries and stronger support for their families because of this legislation. That includes assistance for military spouses whose careers involve relicensing, and it includes high-quality childcare on military bases. This legislation will also bring some serious updates and improvements to Texas military bases. Joint Base San Antonio, Joint Bases Fort Worth and Fort Hood, and the Pantex Plant in Amarillo will all receive additional funding for updates and facilities to improve their capabilities and mission readiness.