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Senate

The Senate met at 10 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 God, our hearts are steadfast toward You. Lead us faithfully to the refuge of Your choosing, for You desire to give us a future and a hope.

Today, give our Senators the power to do Your will as they realize more fully that they are servants of Heaven and stewards of Your mysteries. Lord, inspire them to seek Your best for our Nation, repeatedly requesting Your guidance and following Your leading. May they help people maximize possibilities for Your glory.

We pray in Your sacred 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 (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

NOMINATIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, we are getting, perhaps, close to a new Presidency. So there is a lot of talk about how the Senate might handle new Cabinet people. Democrats are always lecturing Republican Senators about approving future Biden Cabinet nominees, even if we don't agree with them.

Now, that is pretty darn rich. In other words, they are saying something

like this: Don't follow our example from the past four years.

Or another way to put that is: Don't treat Biden nominees to the Cabinet like we treated Trump nominees to the Cabinet.

So they seem to want two sets of rules for Republican and Democratic Cabinet nominees, just like they want with judicial nominees.

President Obama had six Cabinet Secretaries approved by the Senate on his Inauguration Day, without even needing a rollcall vote, so that President Obama could hit the ground running.

President Trump had none by voice vote, and only two were approved by rollcall votes before the President took over. Trump Cabinet and sub-Cabinet nominees, even ones who had been easily confirmed in previous Republican administrations, faced obstruction and partisan "nay" votes. Many Democrat Senators who aspired to be President voted against virtually every single Trump nominee, no matter how well qualified.

My position has always been that a President should have the ability to choose his own Cabinet people whom he gets along with and whom he gets along with on policy, provided, of course, that they are qualified and will follow the law.

That is the way it should be. It is how I have approached nominees to date. But can Senate Republicans be sure that if we employ that standard, Democrats will play fair with the next Republican President?

I don't want retaliation for its own sake, but the threat of holding Democratic Senators to their own standards has been our only means of deterrence of obstruction. I want to hear from Democrats why we should not now adopt their standards and vote down nominees based on politics.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Charles Edward Atchley, Jr., of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I am sorry that the Senator from Iowa, who spoke before me, left the floor before I could get his attention.

Senator GRASSLEY is my friend. We have served together for many years. We have worked on a lot of things together, and I bet we will in the future. I like working with him. He shoots from the hip and tells you exactly what he thinks. He has—I know this sounds a little vain—a midwestern approach to him that I like a lot.

He just gave us a little reminder here about the difficulties that faced some

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



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of the Trump nominees on the floor of the U.S. Senate. I remember that. There were some that were delayed because of very basic things. They had not filed their financial disclosure forms and the ethics reports, which were expected of all Cabinet nominees.

I don't expect President-Elect Biden to cut any corners. I expect his nominees to follow the rules and the law, and I am hoping that they will have bipartisan support when it comes to the Senate. I want to give this President a chance to get off to a good, solid start, and he is going to need it.

We are in the midst of this pandemic. The numbers that roll in every single day are frightening. Even in my home State of Illinois, where Governor Pritzker and Mayor Lightfoot and so many others have worked hard to establish standards of conduct that will keep people safe, we know that the numbers are just unacceptable in terms of infections and hospitalizations and, sadly, deaths as well. Over 300,000 Americans have died.

We want to make sure that President Biden and Vice President Harris have the team and the wherewithal and the resources to respond quickly when they take office on January 20.

I hope my Republican friends will join me in that effort. They have every right to expect these nominees to answer the very basic questions that are required, but I hope that they will also do their best to expedite that process so that those going into critical positions to keep our country safe from this pandemic are in place, as well as those who are going to serve our Nation in critical capacities, whether it is Secretary of State or Attorney General or Department of Homeland Security.

But I look forward to working with my friend from Iowa. I take heed of his warning that we will hold these nominees to the same standards as we held President Trump's nominees.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Madam President, we are at the eleventh hour before a funding deadline where the budget of the United States is at stake. Tomorrow, the continuing resolution expires, and we are facing the prospect of another continuing resolution. I pray that we don't do that.

This has been a very disappointing year for the Appropriations process. Historically, the process begins with the President's budget, and then comes a budget resolution passed by the House and the Senate for the spending priorities in the next fiscal year. We didn't do that.

Then there is an allocation, usually, after the passage of a budget resolution of how much each subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee can work with, the total amounts of dollars. We didn't do that.

Then the subcommittees have hearings, and some of these subcommittees of Appropriations have many hearings, to explore whether the dollar amounts that are allocated for a certain purpose really are well spent and serve their purpose. We didn't do that.

Then the subcommittee is supposed to meet and vote out an appropriations bill at the end of that process, reporting it to the full committee. And we didn't do that.

Then the Appropriations Committee is supposed to take up the subcommittee's product, debate it, subject to amendment, and pass it out for a consideration by the full body. We never did that as well.

The matter is supposed to come to the floor of the Senate, be debated, as well, perhaps amended, and pass the Senate, if it has the right, the necessary votes. We didn't do that.

Then it is supposed to go to the House of Representatives to see how it matches up with their similar work product. We didn't do that either.

Ultimately, it may result in a conference report, according to the rules, between the House and the Senate, and that never happened.

So the entire budget appropriations process was completely avoided, and we find ourselves extending a continuing resolution for the spending of the U.S. Government for weeks at a time until after the election.

So now we face the prospect, at the eleventh hour, of a decision to finish the work we were elected to do or to simply delay the situation again.

Well, we need to do our job, and we need to do it now. We need to pass our annual appropriations bills to keep the government running. I cannot imagine the unforgivable and embarrassing tragedy it would be if the government is shut down for our failure to reach a decision.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, we need to pass a COVID relief bill.

I was happy to join a group of 10 Senators—5 Democrats and 5 Republicans—3 weeks ago. We met for dinner one night—safe social distancing—in one of the Member's houses and spent several hours talking about our frustration that we hadn't passed a COVID relief bill since March, when we passed the CARES Act. And we know that things have gotten worse in this country, not only with the pandemic but also with the state of the economy. For some reason, we just couldn't reach an agreement—the two parties.

Well, this mixed group of Senators of both political parties had a bold idea: Let's try to do it ourselves. So we sat down, and in the course of 3 weeks, I cannot tell you how many hours we spent on the phone—zoom calls, other conference calls, and calls were even taking place on Thanksgiving Day—talking about what a COVID relief bill might look like. Some of the items we debated long and hard. Most of them we agreed on.

This last Tuesday, this week, we reported our bill to the U.S. Senate, to the floor of the Senate, and to the leaders. And we didn't just give them a memo with concepts. We gave them an actual bill that could be introduced today.

The bill itself is significant in that it has \$748 billion in spending.

The areas of spending are fairly predictable: extending unemployment insurance benefits with a \$300-a-week Federal supplement; \$300 billion for business loans for those that are struggling to survive; an additional \$13 billion for the food stamp program, now known as SNAP, so that people who are relying on that, perhaps in the midst of unemployment, will have enough to eat; \$13 billion for our farmers; \$25 billion for emergency rental assistance to avoid evictions; \$34 billion to hospitals and clinics for help as well, with a portion of that set aside for rural hospitals; \$16 billion for testing and tracing and the logistics of delivering the vaccine across America; \$12 billion for a CDFI project for minority businesses.

There is \$5 billion for additional help with mental health counseling, and we know that this pandemic and the economy have taken their toll on the mental health of America.

There is \$82 billion for education, \$20 billion of that for higher education, school districts and schools—universities too. They have to spend a lot of money because of COVID-19, and we want to help them get back on their feet.

There is \$10 billion for childcare, a critical element for many families. If they can't find childcare, many people can't go back to work. We want to give them help.

There is \$10 billion for broadband. Expanding broadband became critically important when kids relied on it to continue their education on remote learning.

There is \$45 billion for transportation, everything from the airline industry to Amtrak, to transit, to buses. They have all been hit hard, and we need them to come back with our economy.

There is \$10 billion for our Postal Service, and, boy, have they worked hard during this pandemic to keep up with the demands.

And there are extensions of opportunities to use CARES money into the next fiscal year—the next calendar year, I should say.

There were more. We reached agreement on all of these and came up with a bill that we presented to the leadership of both the House and the Senate, both parties. The good news is they didn't ignore it; they embraced it and started their own negotiations at the very highest levels of leadership in the Congress.

Fingers crossed, we may come up with a bill today, a COVID relief bill. So from the time of our press conference on Tuesday to the delivery of a product as soon as today is an amazing accomplishment when you consider all the time that we have spent waiting in hopes that we could find that solution.

We have made significant progress. Funding the government is basic to our work in Congress, and this COVID relief bill is essential as well.