

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.

Now, I am disappointed in our work product. There is pride and disappointment. The disappointment is the fact that we didn't reach an agreement on State and local government assistance. I favor that strongly, and I hope we turn to that issue as soon as we return in January.

Also, there was a question of liability and lawsuits during the time of COVID-19. We offered several alternatives. The Republicans countered with theirs. We never had a meeting of the minds on that issue. I hope that we do return to it at some point soon.

We need to put government spending on a course that makes sense for the next year that we are going to be tackling as soon as January. From the military and the FBI, public housing and transportation, to medical research and cybersecurity, in any way that we approach it, governing by CR is the worst possible way to do business.

Continuing resolutions impede our government's ability to operate efficiently and, frankly, waste money. Taxpayers deserve better. The continuing resolution would leave us operating under funding levels before we faced this national emergency, which affects every part of America today.

It would restrict agencies from shifting dollars around to meet the challenges, and it would hurt their ability to plan ahead, hire and train new employees, start new projects.

Continuing resolutions cause delays in contracts and grants when we need them the most. There are many examples of these, such as funding for medical research. I don't think there is an American alive today who doesn't value medical research today more than they did a year ago.

The Warp Speed project appears to be a dramatic success. I pray that it will be. Although I have been a frequent critic of this administration, I want to give them credit for organizing this effectively and delivering a vaccine in a timely way—an almost amazing timely way—in this pandemic that we face. I thank all who were involved in it, especially the scientists and researchers who didn't give up until they found these vaccines.

We know that FEMA would be prohibited from awarding Homeland Security grants to State and local governments unless we do our business of passing a budget. Safety and efficiency improvements in our transportation programs, such as bridge repairs, need to be timely and implemented. States and cities would not receive their community development block grants, which they desperately need. The list goes on and on.

Our constituents elected us to do a job, and part of that job is to create a budget for this government. Months of bipartisan committee work and weeks of bipartisan negotiations should not be cast aside. I am hopeful that we will finalize a deal today and vote on it as early as today or tomorrow at the latest.

We can't expect people to wait with any patience. We have waited too long ourselves.

CYBER SECURITY

Madam President, let me close on a topic that is related to this. The press reports of Russian hacking into the security systems of the United States are as troubling as can be. This is nothing short of a virtual invasion by the Russians into critical accounts of our Federal Government.

It is possible that they have compromised some of the most important and sensitive information that this government owns, information that we rely on to keep America safe. Of course, Vladimir Putin denies it, but we know better. It is not the first time, but I hope it is one of the last times.

We need to make it clear to Mr. Putin, to China, to Iran, to North Korea, and to any nation that would compromise and breach our security that there is a price to pay. No, I am not calling for an invasion myself or all-out war. I don't want to see that happen, but it is no longer a buddy-buddy arrangement between the United States and Vladimir Putin. We have to take this man very seriously because he is a serious threat to the United States when he captures this kind of information, which we use so that our troops are safe in the field and we are safe in our homes.

We thought we had a defense mechanism established. It turns out that it failed and compromised the integrity of our security in the cyber world. We need to do better and, through the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense, dedicate the resources and say to Mr. Putin and others like him around the world: We are not going to stand by and let you take advantage of us. There will be a price to pay for this.

Frankly, if we do anything less than that, it is hard to imagine we are doing our best to protect this great Nation. There will be more. I am sure there will be security briefings for Members of Congress going into detail here, but the news that is coming out in the media is very troubling.

We need to do all that we can to keep America safe. And when adversaries such as Russia torment us, tempt us, breach the security of our Nation, we need to respond in kind.

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. THUNE. 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. THUNE. Madam President, I am encouraged that we are making progress on coronavirus relief legislation, but we need to finish up and get this bill out the door. The virus is surging

around the country, and we need to get help to struggling Americans as soon as possible. The time for debate is over. Let's get this done.

We started this week out with a tremendously hopeful moment in our COVID fight—the first vaccinations against this virus. It is incredible that barely a year since we first learned about the virus, we have a vaccine, with more vaccines likely on the way. I have been thinking a lot this week about the people who volunteered for vaccine trials.

We have gained a new appreciation this year for a lot of people whose work we might have taken for granted in the past—the farmers and grocery store workers and truckdrivers who kept food on our grocery store shelves; the delivery drivers, whom we have relied on so heavily this year, who have brought our packages to us so we can minimize our time at the store; all the workers whose jobs can't be done from home—from electrical workers, to trashmen, to pharmacists—who get up every day and put on their masks and go out and keep our country running; and, of course, our Nation's medical professionals, who have faced down this virus with courage and determination and with great compassion.

There have been a lot of quiet heroes this year, and the people who volunteered for vaccine trials should be high on that list. A lot of courageous people stepped forward when we needed them, and we would not have a COVID vaccine today without their willingness to help.

Monday was the beginning of what will hopefully be a decisive victory in our COVID battle. We owe that to the hard work and persistence of medical researchers, but we owe it also to the vaccine trial volunteers, who enabled researchers to complete the process of developing a safe and effective vaccine.

It is no exaggeration to say that the bravery of vaccine volunteers could end up saving hundreds of thousands or even millions of lives. I doubt we will ever know most of the volunteers' names, but they are heroes of this battle just the same, and I am very grateful for the opportunity they have given us to defeat this virus.

TRIBUTE TO JOHANNA JABLONSKI

Madam President, before I close, I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to one of my staffers, Johanna Jablonski. Johanna is originally from the small town of Ethan, SD, and is a graduate of and former basketball star at Mount Marty College.

She first joined our team as a summer intern, working in Sioux Falls. A little over 6 years ago, she moved to Washington, DC, and became a permanent member of the office. She started out as a staff assistant and eventually worked her way up to become my scheduler—and our starting pitcher, I might add—here in DC.

When Johanna first came to my office, she intended to move back home after a year or two, but God had plans