

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

for her here in DC. About 3 years ago, she met her husband Anthony at a Boy Scouts fish fry at St. Peter's Church right here on Capitol Hill. I know Johanna regards that as a blessing for her, but it was a blessing for our office, too, because we got to keep her around a little longer than she had originally anticipated. But now, in a couple of weeks, Johanna will move back to South Dakota. We are all very excited for her, but she will be sorely missed.

Madam President, I know I don't have to tell you or any other Senator here just how important the role of a scheduler is in any office. The days here on Capitol Hill are busy. Our schedulers are the ones who bring some semblance of organization to an otherwise chaotic day, making sure we get to connect with our constituents in town, make it to committee hearings and votes on time, get the briefings we need on legislation, and much more.

Johanna is not only a good scheduler, she is a great one. I will miss her patience, her professionalism, and her unparalleled ability to keep trains running on time. But what I and I think the rest of my staff will miss the most about Johanna is her kindness. Johanna has had a positive impact on pretty much every staffer who has worked with me during her time here, taking the time to get to know each of them on a personal level. Whether she is interacting with an agency head, constituent, or a fellow staffer, she is always the same—unfailingly gracious, patient, and kind.

No matter how busy or chaotic the day, Johanna can be counted on to bring a steady hand and a positive attitude. She is a woman of deep faith, and it shows. I am sad to see her go, but I want to wish her the very best of everything as she embarks on this new chapter in life.

Johanna, thank you for all your hard work on behalf of South Dakota. You will be missed.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, well, we in Congress are no strangers to December funding deadlines or the occasional pre-Christmas cliffhanger.

In that respect, the situation we face now is familiar. Funding for the Federal Government is hanging in the balance. In the next few days, Congress will either succeed or fail at providing secure and stable funding for our military commanders, our Federal Depart-

ments, and key investments for our future.

Fortunately, our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee and their House counterparts have been on the case. Bipartisan, bicameral committee work has full-year government funding legislation on the 1-yard line.

I am optimistic that if we can close out our other parallel business, we should be able to fund the government and move forward together.

But that brings me to the way in which this year is unlike anything we have seen before. It has been more than 9 months since our Nation began to feel the full force of the COVID-19 pandemic. The American people have done what Americans do when crises come knocking.

Essential workers have kept our Nation running. Healthcare professionals have worked day and night to care for strangers. Heroic American businesses have adapted, reinvented, and obeyed the advice of medical experts.

Now we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Operation Warp Speed has given us safe and effective vaccines in record time, but the American people need another bridge to those better days that are not so far off. The country needs Congress to come through with another targeted rescue package. They have waited months. They have waited and suffered, and some have died while needless political games have played out. The American people's wait for more emergency assistance ought to be over.

For months, I have called for a targeted, bipartisan package that would put hundreds of billions of dollars into payroll support, testing, vaccine distribution, extended unemployment aid, safe schools, and other essential priorities.

So I am encouraged that our Democratic colleagues have now embraced this framework that has been the right solution for our country all this time. And a bipartisan, bicameral agreement appears to be close at hand.

The outline that I have been discussing with the Democratic leader, Speaker PELOSI, and Leader MCCARTHY would get another huge dose of bipartisan support out the door as fast as possible.

We have yet to nail down every detail, but in broad strokes, we have been discussing the targeted second round of the job-saving Paycheck Protection Program that Republicans have sought since last summer.

We are discussing many tens of billions of dollars for distributing vaccines, COVID testing, and equipping safe schools to get our kids' educations back on track. We are discussing extending important unemployment programs.

At the particular urging of President Trump and Secretary Mnuchin, who continue to be the champions of cash relief for American families, we are discussing more direct impact payments for individuals, plus the bonus for families with children.

These are just some of the major pillars. And equally important, we are agreeing to be smart about financing these extraordinary policies.

Now listen to this. We intend to re-purpose more than \$400 billion in unspent funds which we have already allocated in the CARES Act. It turned out these funds did not need to be tapped to restore basic stability to our economy. It is time we put that money to urgent use.

Like I said at the time yesterday, I am heartened by our discussions and our progress. I believe all sides are working in good faith for our shared goal of getting an outcome.

But I will say this. In my judgment, we are very close to a point that arises in every major negotiation. It is the point where each side faces a fork in the road.

Do we want to lapse into politics as usual and let negotiations lose steam? Do we want to haggle and spar like this were an ordinary political exercise, get wrapped around the axle of language or policy riders that we know are controversial, or, on the other hand, after months of inaction, do we want to move swiftly and with unusual bipartisanship to close out our issues, seal the deal, and write text that can quickly pass into law?

In short, we are near the point in this process where we decide if we are going to stay on the fast track or drift back toward business as usual.

I say the answer should be obvious. After all these months, struggling Americans don't just need action; they need action fast—fast.

So I continue to appreciate our productive discussions, but I hope we also remember just how urgent the situation is for millions and millions of our fellow citizens.

So for the information of all Senators, we are going to stay right here—right here—until we are finished, even if that means working through the weekend, which is highly likely.

And if we need to further extend the Friday funding deadline before final legislation can pass in both Chambers, I hope we will extend it for a very, very short—short—window of time.

Our citizens can't afford for us to get bogged down in the back-and-forth. Let's finish up our bipartisan framework. Let's make law as soon as possible. That is what our people deserve.

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.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we continue to move closer to a final