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Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the Honorable DEB FISCHER, a Senator from the State of Nebraska.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, as the new year beckons, our souls rise to meet You, for You are the source of our strength and the hope of our lives. We put our lives in Your hands, trusting You with all our tomorrows.

Lord, You bless us with Your peace, even in the midst of life's storms.

Uphold our Senators. Give them hours that sustain rather than stress. Permit the rhythm of Your truth to free them from the bondage that debilitates. May they find strength in You as they give You their restlessness and doubts.

We pray in Your wonderful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer 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.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, December 31, 2020.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable DEB FISCHER, a Senator from the State of Nebraska, to perform the duties of the Chair.

CHUCK GRASSLEY,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. FISCHER thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

JUST AND UNIFYING SOLUTIONS TO INVIGORATE COMMUNITIES EVERYWHERE ACT OF 2020—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. McCONNELL. I move to proceed to Calendar No. 480, S. 3985.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 480, S. 3985, a bill to improve and reform policing practices, accountability and transparency.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, yesterday, the Senate was finally able to proceed to this year's National Defense Authorization Act. A few of our Democratic colleagues have pulled out all the stops to hold back this crucial bill, but last night, a big bipartisan majority of 80 Senators voted to proceed.

There should be nothing controversial about giving our brave men and

women in uniform the tools and training they need to stay safe. There should be nothing controversial about continuing the work of rebuilding and modernizing our capabilities. It should be a nonpartisan proposition that America should keep pace with Russia and China rather than slip behind.

We have enacted an annual NDAA for 59 straight years and counting. In the next few days, the easy way or the hard way, we are going to do our job once again. This body will fulfill our responsibility to the men and women who protect our country. The Senate will be here until we finish this bipartisan legislation.

Now, for several days, we heard some Senators say Congress must send more cash to high-earning households that haven't seen any income disruption during COVID-19. Our colleagues who purport to be the champions of vulnerable Americans now say that what struggling people really need is for Congress to stop focusing on targeted relief for them specifically and, instead, to send thousands of dollars to people who don't need the help.

Experts from across the political spectrum agree that our colleague from Vermont is dead wrong on this. Socialism for rich people is a terrible way to help the American families who are actually struggling. Let me say that again. Borrowing from our grandkids to do socialism for rich people is a terrible way to get help for families who actually need it.

Washington Democrats took President Trump's suggestion and skewed it so the checks would benefit even more high-earning households.

Imagine a family of five where the parents earn \$250,000 per year and have not seen any income loss this past year. Speaker PELOSI and Senator SANDERS want to send them \$5,000 from Uncle Sam. They make a quarter of a million dollars, nobody is out of work, but our so-called progressive friends say the household needs "survival

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



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checks." In fact, they believe a family of five should have to earn \$350,000 before the spigot of government money would stop entirely.

Socialism for rich people. That is what Speaker PELOSI and Senator SANDERS have sketched out. A terrible way to help those who need it, and experts across the political spectrum agree.

The liberal editors of the Washington Post have blasted so-called progressives demanding a nontargeted giveaway that would give "huge amounts" to "perfectly comfortable families."

Larry Summers, who ran the Treasury Department for President Clinton and the National Economic Council for President Obama, says there is "no good economic argument" for more nontargeted checks with no linkage to need.

The liberal New York Times reported this morning that a majority of the households that get nontargeted checks do not end up spending them on urgent needs but rather just add it to their savings. "We know where the pockets of need are," said one economist, and "putting [money] there would be a much more efficient use."

Fortunately, though some of our colleagues seem to have forgotten, that is exactly what we did only a week ago. It has been less than 5 days since President Trump signed into law another historic bipartisan rescue package targeted to Americans who actually need the help.

We passed an entire second round of PPP loans to save small business jobs, targeted to the hardest hit. We renewed multiple kinds of additional benefits for unemployed workers, including an extra \$300 supplement every week. There are billions for targeted food assistance, billions for targeted rental assistance, and many billions of dollars for vaccine distribution so we can finally beat this virus and reopen the economy in full.

These are the kinds of targeted emergency programs that directly help the most vulnerable, and we just poured almost another trillion dollars into them, less than 5 days ago, along with more direct checks that are already arriving in households' accounts. That is what we did just 5 days ago.

This crisis has not affected everyone equally. The data show that many upper middle-class Americans have kept their jobs, worked remotely, and remained totally financially comfortable. On the other hand, some of our fellow citizens had their entire existence turned upside down and continue to suffer terribly.

We do not need to let the Speaker of the House do socialism for rich people in order to help those who need help. Our duty, both to struggling Americans and to taxpayers, is to focus on targeted relief that will have the maximum impact and help the people who need it the most. That is what the experts say we should do. That is where there is broad bipartisan support, and

that is exactly what we did less than 1 week ago, when nearly \$900 billion in more targeted relief was signed into law for our people.

RECOGNITION OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 9051

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, the Senate today meets for a rare New Year's Eve session for one reason and one reason only: The Republican leader has refused to allow us to vote on legislation to provide the American people \$2,000 checks. He has twice objected to my requests to set a time for a vote on the measure, claiming yesterday that direct stimulus checks were "poorly targeted," bemoaning the idea that some of these checks might go into "the hands of Democrats' rich friends who don't need the help." Senator TOOMEY said much the same thing.

Well, funny, I don't remember the Republican leader and Senator TOOMEY complaining about how a \$2 trillion across-the-board corporate tax cut was "poorly targeted" because some large companies didn't need the help. No, when corporations get a blanket tax break, that is fine by the Republican majority. When the average American gets a little help from their government, it is "poorly targeted."

I hope that every American heard the objections by these Republican Senators. I hope every American who has their water or heat or electricity shut off or had eviction notices stapled on top of one another to their door or had to choose which meal to skip on a given day—I hope they all heard the reason they will not receive \$2,000 checks is because Leader MCCONNELL thinks it could wind up in the hands of "Democrats' rich friends."

Let's be very clear. There is one way and only one way to pass \$2,000 checks before the end of the year, and that is to pass the House bill. It is the only way to get the American people the \$2,000 checks they need and deserve.

The House is gone for the session. Any modification or addition to the House bill can't become law. Either the Senate takes up and passes the House bill or struggling Americans will not get \$2,000 checks during the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

Leader MCCONNELL knows this. So he has said that the Senate can only vote on a bill that combines the checks with other unrelated partisan policies: a repeal of section 230 and an investigation into the President's dishonest and bogus claims of election fraud.

The Republican leader claims that President Trump insists that all three issues must be addressed in one bill, but, of course, the President has made

no such demand. President Trump couldn't care less about how the bills are packaged in Congress.

So the Republican leader has invented an excuse to prevent a clean, up-or-down, yes-or-no vote on \$2,000 checks from coming to the floor. This maneuver to combine all three issues is intended to kill the possibility of \$2,000 checks ever becoming law.

Just to prove it, let me make this offer to the Republican majority. We are willing to vote on the other issues that President Trump mentioned—all the issues the Republican leader says must be addressed—so long as we vote on them separately. That way, \$2,000 checks could become law, and we could debate all the President's supposed concerns.

We can vote on setting up a commission to look at the President's roundly rejected claims of voter fraud. We would also have the commission look at voter suppression and gerrymandering. That is completely unrelated to helping Americans pay their bills, but we are willing to take a look at the whole picture. Just give us a vote on the House-passed bill so we can get help now for people who desperately need it.

Heck, we can also have a vote on repealing 230. We can do it today. We will use Leader MCCONNELL's exact language. He wouldn't agree to that because he knows his caucus wouldn't actually support such an act. Unlike the President, some Members of this body understand what 230 means. They understand that section 230, which certainly needs change, actually enables the President to spew his lies.

We all know the 117th Congress will have to take a close look at the relationship between liability and reckless speech on the internet. But if Leader MCCONNELL wants a vote on these issues, we are here for it. Just give us a vote on the House-passed bill, and we can vote on whatever rightwing conspiracy theory you would like.

We can even vote to set up a special blue-ribbon commission to determine whether Georgia's secretary of State has a brother named Ron, if that would make our Republican friends happy.

Just don't let these conspiracy theories and Presidential fantasies get in the way of helping actual people—people whose livelihoods have been torn apart by this pandemic, people whose lives have been torn apart by the administration's mismanagement of this pandemic, people who need just a little direct assistance.

The President's term, thankfully, will end in 20 days. It is a term that has been marked by hate and division and turmoil. He has so far used his term to enrich himself and the wealthy.

Let's close out the term on a good note. For once, he wants to help regular people, to give Americans a leg up. Let's allow him to do that.

We have a chance at the end of this painful year to give Americans a reason to have some hope in 2021. The only