

which finally cleared the hurdle in Congress yesterday by passing the House, it is now only a Presidential signature away from becoming law. Soon—very soon—the most sweeping recovery effort in recent history will get underway.

Direct checks will be delivered to American families from coast to coast—roughly, 85 percent of all households. The American people can expect those \$1,400 checks for each person in the family to be delivered by the end of March, and we are making amazingly good progress on vaccines. Vaccines will be available far more quickly to far more people.

Just this morning, the Biden administration announced an expansion of the vaccine program, and I was able to announce that more than 100 community health centers in my home State of New York will be eligible to get their own, dedicated supply of vaccines. There is a brand new vaccine supercharge for New York and for some of the rest of the Nation as well—the crux: more vaccines and more sites to administer them. Over 100 sites will be set up across New York State to administer a massive influx of new shot supplies.

There is light at the end of this COVID tunnel, which has always been centered on access to a free vaccine for all New Yorkers. More access and more shots mean a quicker recovery, and that is what we want, and that is becoming available for my home State of New York and for the entire Nation.

The CHC sites, or community health center sites, will be federally funded and organized by the Department of Health and Human Services—a huge expansion. We have all heard numerous stories of people having to travel too far to get the vaccine, hampering our ability to recover and return to normal. With this announcement of more vaccines and more New York sites to administer them, New Yorkers have something to celebrate, and I thank the President for working with us to make this effort real and to bring it to every State in the Nation. Other things are happening, too.

Our schools will receive critical assistance to update their infrastructure, hire more teachers and tutors, and prepare to reopen as fast and as safely as possible.

There is going to be money for broadband. There are going to be dollars for rural hospitals. There are going to be dollars to help our Tribal nations—all who are suffering. The new RESTAURANTS Act, which is so important to so many of our States, is becoming law. More money for Save our Stages to help our arts institutions is coming.

Perhaps the thing that we are the most proud of—although there are so many in this bill—is helping people with their pensions and making sure those who are laid off still get healthcare by funding COBRA fully.

There are so many good things for average working families, but maybe

the most important of all—who knows? There are so many good things in this bill—is the child tax credit, which will cut childhood poverty in half. When a child is born into poverty at no fault of his or her own, they don't get adequate nutrition. They don't get adequate healthcare. They don't get adequate housing. They don't get adequate education. Then, when they get to young adulthood, they have nowhere to go, and then they get blamed for their plight. The better, smarter, more effective thing to do is to help them get out of poverty early so they can lead good, productive lives as citizens and as taxpayers. We are doing that for the first time here, and I hope it is something that we can continue.

Simply put, the American Rescue Plan is one of the most significant pieces of legislation to pass the Congress in recent history.

Yesterday, I started describing in more detail some of the lesser known aspects of the plan. Everyone knows that vaccines are coming, that \$1,400 checks are coming, that money for schools is coming, and now people know of the child tax credit, but there are lots of other things in this bill. Today, I want to continue by talking about another unheralded provision: assistance to Native communities. It is a topic very much on theme today given the nomination of Secretary HAALAND.

One of the most tragic features of the COVID-19 pandemic is how destructive it has been for America's Tribal nations. Native Americans have faced the highest risk of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths due to COVID-19—bar none, the highest. Early in the crisis, the Navajo Nation, to take one example, saw more cases per capita than any other State in the country. Decades of an unraveling social safety net, declining economic opportunity, an overburdened health system, and the failure of the Federal Government to honor its trust obligations to American Tribes left Native communities unequipped to handle the crisis. But in the American Rescue Plan, the Democrats will deliver the single largest investment in Native communities in our Nation's history. We are very proud of that. It is historic—the single largest investment in Native communities in our Nation's history. More than \$31.2 billion in direct funding will go to Tribes and communities to defeat this pandemic and rebuild their communities; \$20 billion directly to Tribal governments so they can stabilize essential services; \$6 billion to the Indian Health Service, not just for vaccines and testing and tracing but to improve and restore these rural, long-neglected hospitals; hundreds of millions more for Native education; \$10 million will go to just making sure communities can access clean water.

Listen to the items I just mentioned: clean water, keeping hospitals running, connecting kids to broadband. These are absolute necessities, and the Amer-

ican Rescue Plan is going to dedicate resources to all of them for Indian Country.

I want to thank a whole bunch of my colleagues. So many contributed, but the chair of the Indian Affairs Committee, Senator SCHATZ, and Senators TESTER and CANTWELL and SMITH and KELLY and BEN RAY LUJÁN and Heinrich are very, very important. Senator HEINRICH particularly pushed for broadband. So it was a team effort, and I am proud of my colleagues.

The American Rescue Plan takes us a giant step closer to fulfilling our trust responsibilities to all Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. This is just one example, an important one, as to how the rescue plan will dramatically improve the lives of millions of people in this great country of ours.

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. Madam 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 Republican leader is recognized.

#### CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, a year ago, coronavirus cases were beginning to climb on U.S. soil. Shutdown measures were starting to take effect.

Americans have endured one of the strangest and most painful years in living memory. Nearly 2 million Americans have been hospitalized with serious cases of the virus. More than half a million have lost their lives. Millions of students and workers have had their lives completely thrown off course. But these dark times have also spotlighted some of the best of America: heroism, selflessness, ingenuity.

Last March, the night we passed the CARES Act without a single dissenting vote, I said we would see a new generation of American heroes, and so we have. Doctors and nurses and first responders have worked tirelessly to help their fellow Americans. Essential workers kept manning their posts and prevented economic collapse. Neighbors looked out for neighbors, and small businesses shifted gears almost overnight. Children and parents have fought to adapt to extraordinary disruptions, and incredible heroes in lab coats in America and worldwide worked at light speed to decode this new enemy and create lifesaving vaccines in record time.

Today, together, we are standing on the cusp of a new springtime for our

country not like anything we have experienced in our lifetimes. More than 95 million vaccine doses have reached American arms; another 2 million every single day. COVID-related deaths have plummeted, now less than half of their high, particularly for the elderly and the vulnerable. Science reaffirms kids can be safely in the classroom right now. States are starting to lift blanket restrictions, freeing citizens and small businesses to follow smart precautions themselves. For weeks, every indicator has suggested our economy is poised to come roaring back, with more job openings for Americans who need work.

None of these trends began on January 20. President Biden and his Democratic government inherited a tide that had already begun to turn toward decisive victory.

In 2020, Congress passed five historic bipartisan bills to save our health system, protect our economic foundations, and fund Operation Warp Speed to find vaccines. Senate Republicans led the bipartisan CARES Act that got our country through the last year.

The American people already built the parade that has been marching toward victory; Democrats just want to sprint in front of the parade and claim credit.

So when 10 Republican Senators went to the White House to suggest working together, the Democrats said: Uh, no. Both the Democratic leader and the White House Chief of Staff now indicate they think President Obama's problem was that he was too bipartisan.

This time, as one journalist put it, the situation was "Democrats to GOP: Take it or leave it." The "it" that we are talking about here was a bill that only spent about 1 percent on vaccines and about 9 percent on the entire health fight. The rest of the tab went to things like this: a \$350 billion bailout for State and local budgets unrelated to pandemic needs, with strings attached to stop States from cutting taxes on their own citizens down the road—take the money, you don't get to cut taxes; massive Federal school funding spread over several years, without requiring quickly reopening; sweeping new government benefits with no work requirements whatsoever—a time warp to the bad times before bipartisan welfare reform—which Democrats already say they want to make permanent; and agricultural assistance conditioned not on specific financial need but solely on the demographics of the farmer, which some liberal activists are celebrating as "reparations." Only about 20 percent of the spending went to \$1,400 direct checks, to try to keep all of the unrelated socialism out of the spotlight.

This wasn't a bill to finish off the pandemic; it was a multitrillion-dollar Trojan horse full of bad, old liberal ideas. President Biden's own staff keep calling this legislation "the most progressive bill in American history"—

hardly the commonsense bipartisan ship that the President promised.

So we pause today at the 1-year mark to remember and to mourn, but we also look with great optimism toward the future. Twenty twenty-one is set to be a historic comeback year, not because of the far-left legislation that was passed after the tide had already turned but because of the resilience of the American people.

(Mr. PADILLA assumed the Chair.)

#### NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, at noon today, the Senate will vote on whether to pluck the Becerra nomination out of committee after it failed to garner enough support to advance.

Every one of President Biden's nominations the Senate has considered so far has received bipartisan support for confirmation. There is a reason Mr. Becerra could not get one single Republican vote to move out of committee. It is because he is such a thoroughly partisan actor with so little subject-matter expertise and such a demonstrated history of hostility toward basic values like the freedom of conscience. There is nothing about Mr. Becerra's record in Congress or in California to suggest he is the best possible person to run the Department of Health and Human Services in the middle of a once-in-a-generation viral pandemic—not even close.

This is too important a job at too important a time for this administration to put raw partisanship ahead of qualifications. So I would strongly urge all Senators to vote against rescuing this nomination from committee. Let's give the President the opportunity to make a better selection.

#### TRIBUTE TO MARY SUIT JONES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Now, Mr. President, on one final matter, as I have mentioned, it is customary for some top Senate staff positions to see new faces when party control changes hands.

Today, it is my honor to pay tribute to Mary Suit Jones, a huge asset to this institution who has become an institution herself.

Tomorrow, Mary will finish her second separate run as Assistant Secretary of the Senate and conclude a Senate career that has spanned more than a quarter of a century.

I first met Mary Jones in the mid-1990s when we brought her on board to help manage my office. Neither I nor Mary's colleagues back then could have predicted that nearly 30 years later, she would depart as one of the most senior officers in the entire place. But the truth is, if you had told us, nobody would have been even a little surprised either.

I have entrusted Mary with a lot of different responsibilities over the years. She served as our office manager

just a few years out of college. She came with me to the Rules Committee, first as deputy staff director and then the top job. Senator Frist had the good judgment to ask her to be Assistant Secretary in the early 2000s. Then she returned to Rules and resumed serving as our staff director under Senators Bob Bennett, Lamar Alexander, and then Pat Roberts. Finally, she generously brought all of this expertise and institutional knowledge back to the Assistant Secretary role 6 years ago.

In her first job in my office, Mary organized one team of people and our infrastructure. In her current job, she has overseen 26 departments and scores of Senate staff, pushing resources and guidance down and pushing information up. In between, at Rules, she tackled things like helping run Presidential inaugurations.

Through it all, I cannot name one time when Mary Jones did not deliver. She is consistent, competent, and completely reliable. No wonder her name has become a kind of catchphrase around the Senate when anyone is trying to track down some key piece of wisdom or is puzzling over how to get something done: "Well, let's ask Mary Jones." "Have you checked with Mary Jones?" "I think Mary knows all about that."

Everyone from junior staff to senior Senators, Republicans and Democrats, have been able to count on Mary for expertise and execution. On a million different subjects, she knows the answer to the question you are going to ask before you even finish asking it. A rock-solid administrator, a consummate professional—she is just that good.

So I am sorry to see Mary depart the Senate, but she has given generously to this place. She has certainly earned the opportunity to apply her many talents to some new challenges and perhaps knock a few miles off of her famously epic commute while she is at it.

The whole Senate thanks Mary for her excellent service. We wish her, her husband, and their kids all the best in the exciting new chapters that lie ahead.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### MOTION TO DISCHARGE—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to discharge the nomination of Xavier Becerra from the Committee on Finance.

The Senator from Oregon.

#### NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senate is now debating the motion to discharge from the Finance Committee the nomination of California Attorney