

Senators GRASSLEY, GRAHAM, CORNYN, and TILLIS—joined the Democratic members in advancing his nomination.

With Mr. Kim leading the ENRD, the American people can trust our Nation's public lands and natural resources will be protected by a proven expert and an accomplished lawyer. I urge my colleagues to join me in voting in favor of his nomination.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now for years, Republicans and Democrats have spoken about the need to invest more in our Nation's infrastructure. We are a country the size of a continent. Every State has critical infrastructure demands, bridges that need repair, railways that need maintenance, sewer systems that desperately need expansion and renovation.

Over a month ago now, a bipartisan group of Senators announced a deal with the White House on a framework for a bipartisan infrastructure bill—a breakthrough moment. Ever since, I have committed both publicly and privately to put that bill on the Senate floor.

Unfortunately, last week, our Republican colleagues prevented the Senate from taking a procedural step to begin the debate. But I want to be very clear. I am fully committed to passing a bipartisan infrastructure bill.

As majority leader, I have the ability to move to reconsider the vote to begin debate on that bill this week. Since Senators are still finalizing the text of the agreement, Senators should be on notice that the Senate may stay in session through the weekend in order to finish the bill.

Let me say that again. Senators should be on notice that the Senate may stay in session through the weekend in order to finish the bipartisan infrastructure bill.

As I have said before, further delays may mean that the Senate will remain in session into the previously scheduled August recess.

We have reached a critical moment. The bipartisan group of Senators has had nearly 5 weeks of negotiations since they first announced an agreement with President Biden. It is time for everyone to get to "yes" and produce an outcome for the American people.

I understand that bipartisan achievements are difficult in our polarized times. Extreme partisans are always rooting for failure. Look no further than the former President.

Just this morning, former President Trump released a statement urging Republicans to retreat from all bipartisan negotiations on infrastructure until after the midterm elections in 2022, maybe longer. Again, the former President said this morning that Republicans are "weak fools and losers"—his words—for even talking to Democrats

and suggested that the Republicans should not negotiate at all unless they are in the majority. FOX News personalities, following his lead, are now encouraging primaries for Republican Senators who support a bipartisan infrastructure deal.

Look, there are always going to be radical voices on the far right who brook no compromise, but that is only a recipe for obstruction and gridlock. We have the opportunity right now to actually accomplish something good for the American people.

Will our Republican colleagues follow the absurd demands of the disgraced former President and his media allies, or will they get a good, bipartisan deal over the finish line? Republican Senators must ignore former President Trump if we are ever going to make progress with the American people. He is rooting for our entire political system to fail. I and the rest of my Democratic colleagues are rooting for a deal.

NOMINATIONS

Madam President, now on nominations, the Senate will not remain idle in the meantime. This week, we will consider several highly qualified nominees to the Biden administration. Tonight, the Senate will invoke cloture on Todd Kim—someone the Senator from Illinois has just spoken about—to serve as the Assistant Attorney General and the head of the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Justice Department, where he worked as a lawyer for nearly 8 years.

The son of Korean immigrants, Mr. Kim fell in love with America's natural treasures at a young age, when his parents took him on an RV trip across the American West. After tonight, he will be in a position to defend those very treasures by making sure our environmental laws are enforced, our Federal lands are maintained, and our relationship with Native Tribes is respected.

I look forward to confirming his nomination.

Senators should also be aware there may be additional votes on nominations this week, including members of the National Labor Relations Board and potentially votes to advance nominees from our Senate committees.

The Senate has a constitutional duty to advise and consent on Presidential appointments. We will continue that important work this week.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent to speak as if in morning business.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I want to back up what the majority leader said. The day was May 22, 2019. I remember it well. Two things happened that morning. First was the birth of my granddaughter, which was an exciting and happy event. The second was just the opposite. It was a meeting in

the White House with President Donald Trump, and the purpose of the meeting was to discuss infrastructure.

You see, we had an earlier meeting. Democrats met with the leaders of the Trump administration to discuss an infrastructure bill. When we suggested \$1.5 trillion be spent on infrastructure. President Trump said: No, make it \$2 trillion.

Well, we were happy to hear that. Then when we suggested that President Trump's earlier suggestion of 80 percent of it being paid on a State and local basis rather than Federal, he reversed himself. He said it will be 80 percent Federal. More good news.

Then came the suggestion: Well, it shouldn't just be horizontal infrastructure. It ought to be vertical infrastructure—broadband, school buildings, things that we desperately need in America.

And he said: Include them; let's make that part of the package.

It was one of the best meetings.

Then came the subject of how we were going to pay for it, and President Donald Trump said: Stop. I am not going to get into that conversation.

Well, we said: Mr. President, we have agreed on what we are going to do, but we have to pay for it.

He said: No, you are not going to trap me with raising taxes or doing things that are politically unpopular.

So we postponed this follow-up meeting to this May 22 date—May 22, 2019. We were anxious to get it done because, during his Presidency, there had been no infrastructure programs—none, nothing—despite his promises to the contrary during the campaign.

We came back May 22. He walked in the room and he said to all of us assembled there: As long as you are investigating me for any reason, there will be no infrastructure bill.

He wheeled around and walked out. That was the end of the conversation about infrastructure in the Trump administration. It was never seriously considered or debated after that.

Now we are engaged in a new exercise. Some Republican Senators—and I thank them for their courage and initiative—want to sit down with Democrats and see if we can finally, after years and years, come up with an infrastructure bill to rebuild America.

They are under pressure. They are under pressure from Senator MCCONNELL. He didn't want them to engage in this kind of bipartisan negotiation. And now, today, former President Trump has joined the chorus, saying they shouldn't bargain at all with Democrats. Put it off another year, 2 years, whatever it has to be, until the Republicans control the whole process. That is a recipe for achieving little or nothing. We know that.

So I sincerely hope that this week will be a breakthrough week. Senator SCHUMER, the Democratic majority leader, tried to get it started last week with a simple procedural vote that would move us to this conversation,

but he was unlucky and was unable to get that done, but he has maintained the procedural option of reconsidering that vote. I certainly hope that will happen soon.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on a separate issue, we are at a pivotal moment in the fight against COVID-19. Thanks to the leadership of this administration, our Nation has had one of the most successful vaccination efforts in the world: 340 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in the United States, 80 percent of Americans over the age of 65 have been fully vaccinated—80 percent. That means the vast majority of our senior population is protected from being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19.

Yet, at this moment, there is trouble on the horizon. Case numbers across the country are ticking back up. It is important to note why. The Delta variant is spreading like wildfire among unvaccinated people. I have heard quotes from some that it is a thousand times more transmissible than the original COVID-19. And it has quickly become the dominant strain of this virus in America.

There is good news. The vaccines that we all have access to right now will stop the Delta variant in its tracks. They will save your life. With the spread of the Delta variant, the reality for Americans is quickly becoming: Get vaccinated or risk contracting a serious or deadly case of COVID-19.

As Dr. Walensky, the Director of the CDC, said last week—and I quote her—“this is quickly becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated.”

Over the past week, we have started to see a renewed sense of urgency from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. They finally—finally—become more vocal about dispelling disinformation about the vaccines. Even FOX News has begun airing public service announcements and encouraging viewers to get vaccinated against the coronavirus. I applaud them for starting to join the chorus of scientific experts, health officials, and community leaders who have been calling on Americans to protect themselves and their loved ones, because it was only a few weeks ago when a couple prime-time hosts on FOX expressed their displeasure with me personally.

I was alarmed, and said so on the floor of the Senate, by some of the ideas that Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham were pedaling. Their anti-vax rhetoric, quite simply, put their viewers and the families of their viewers at risk. We can disagree on political issues, and I am sure we will continue to do so, but we shouldn't play political games with life and death when it comes to COVID-19 vaccines.

We have seen a shift in tone recently. Some hosts on FOX, specifically Sean Hannity and Steve Doocy, now encourage their viewers to get vaccinated. At the very least, they call on them to consult with their doctors. It is a move

in the right direction, but we ought to make it clear once and for all publicly, where we can, that those who are spreading this anti-vax rhetoric are literally risking the lives of our fellow Americans.

We are seeing the good that comes from sharing the facts about vaccines and potential to save lives. As of yesterday, the 7-day average of newly vaccinated Americans is up nearly over one-third from last year week. Nearly 7 in 10 American adults have one dose of COVID vaccine. We need to keep it up.

More than 610,000 of our family members and friends and neighbors in America have died from this disease—and millions more around the world. We have the power within our hands, with vaccines, to stop this pandemic. We all have to do our part.

I want to take an opportunity to recognize something else. Disinformation is not the only reason why people are not getting vaccinated. Sadly, there is a long history of racial bias in our Nation's institutions, from education to housing, to healthcare. That history of racial bias has, understandably, led some Americans to question our institutions based on fear.

Let me first say this: Trust has to be earned.

We have a lot of work to do as a nation to address racial inequities in our healthcare system, like the fact that Black women are three times more likely than White women to die from pregnancy-related complications. Acknowledging these inequities, doing something about them, is how we can build and regain trust. That is the work we have to do.

President Biden's American Rescue Plan was an important investment in tackling health disparities. It increased funding for community outreach, expanded support for community health centers. It provided a \$1 billion investment in the National Health Service Corps to help recruit more doctors, nurses, and other health professionals from communities of color. That was a provision that I added to the bill.

At this moment, if you are still unvaccinated against COVID-19 and you have questions, reach out to a medical professional that you trust. Talk with your doctor, ask them whatever questions you wish, but make sure you have the facts on your side, because the sad truth is the pandemic has deepened the existing racial disparities in America.

Last year, there was nearly a 3-year drop in life expectancy among Black and Brown Americans—3 years. Communities of color have been three times more likely to be hospitalized, twice as likely to die from COVID. We can end this cycle of sickness and despair, but we have got to stop the spread of the new variants. So please consult a medical professional and ask about getting vaccinated.

RANSOMWARE

Madam President, on another issue, a committee we both serve on, the Sen-

ate Judiciary Committee, is going to have an important hearing tomorrow on the issue of ransomware.

For those who may be unfamiliar, ransomware is a type of malicious software that can infect a computer. If hackers attack your computer system with it, they can lock up all the data in your system and demand a ransom payment in exchange for unlocking the data. As a product of our digital age, ransomware is a relatively new threat, but it could impact any individual, business, or organization.

Many Americans had a rude awakening about this threat earlier this year, when a cyber crime syndicate used ransomware to shut down the largest petroleum pipeline in the United States: the Colonial Pipeline. That shutdown sparked a nationwide panic that had people lining up at gas stations for hours, and it put the threat of ransomware into plain view for all Americans. Perhaps someone you know has had their world turned upside down by a ransomware attack. Tomorrow, we will discuss it at length.

GUN VIOLENCE

Madam President, we begin this week with yet another devastating toll of weekend gun violence across America, including the city of Chicago. More than 70 people were shot this past weekend in Chicago. Ten died. If you remember 2 weeks ago, Fourth of July weekend, over 100 people were victims of gunshots in Chicago. In that case, 19 of them died.

It is a mass killing on a regular basis in that great city. Much of it is concentrated in sections of the city, but it is starting to spread because it is so darned easy for a person to get their hands on a gun in that city.

Shootings in Chicago have surged during the COVID pandemic. We see it happening across America. The Biden administration is taking steps in the right direction to stop this gun violence: Cracking down on untraceable ghost guns, rogue gun dealers, and these braces, this equipment that can effectively turn pistols into short-barreled rifles.

Crucially, the Department of Justice announced the launch of five firearm trafficking strike forces. Chicago is one of the cities. New York; San Francisco; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles, are the others.

These strike forces will confront what I believe to be one of the most important causes of this gun violence: the illicit trafficking of guns. These strike forces will also provide support for law enforcement who are on the frontlines of fighting gun violence.

As a testament to that fact, last week, Attorney General Garland joined me in Chicago to highlight how the Justice Department is standing with our police officers and first responders. I am grateful that Attorney General Garland returned to his hometown of Chicago for this purpose. But sadly, it was a somber homecoming.

We first met with police officers and the mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot,