



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 167

WASHINGTON, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2021

No. 172

Senate

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

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

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You alone are our God, our sure defense and safe haven. Give us the wisdom to refuse to trust in our strength but to depend totally on You. Continue to illuminate the minds of our lawmakers as You lead them with Your truth.

Lord, purify their mistakes and remove their disappointments as they strive to live for Your glory. Arise up and help them. Ransom them with Your unfailing love. Lord of Heaven's armies, stay among us as You continue to be our fortress for life's journey.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore 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.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will pro-

ceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Paloma Adams-Allen, of the District of Columbia, to be a Deputy Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alaska.

CORONAVIRUS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this afternoon, unexpectedly. I had anticipated that I was going to be taking the long trek home, for even a short weekend, going back to Alaska. That is not the case this weekend, unfortunately.

Our COVID numbers are at alltime highs, and most of the events and meetings that I would have had back home canceled. They are on Zoom. So life is just a little bit different. You roll with it. And it means that I am here in Washington, DC, on this Friday afternoon.

But I opened up the paper this morning, the Anchorage Daily News, our largest statewide newspaper, to, again, headlines that have just kind of unfolded over these past weeks with more just grim and difficult news. The headline today is: "Alaska infection rate remains high with over 1,200 new COVID cases."

We are leading—we are leading the Nation right now in our COVID rates, and it is interesting. Alaska has—we are separated enough geographically, but through the advantages of air travel and road travel, we mix, we mingle, we get around, and the virus knows no bounds, as we all know. But as we are seeing, thankfully, the case counts beginning to decline here in the lower 48, Alaska is doing just the opposite.

I am quoting here from our paper:

On average, the U.S. saw a 26% decrease in cases over the last two weeks while Alaska recorded an 84% increase.

They go on to say:

If Alaska were a country, it would be the nation with the world's highest per capita case rate, according to data from the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.

The article proceeds to state that:

Alaska's 171 average daily cases per 100,000 over the last seven days is nearly double the rate seen in West Virginia, which . . . [is currently] second in the [Nation]. Bermuda and Serbia, at the top of the global list, have a case rate of 99.

So we are at 171 average daily cases per 100,000. It has been challenging. We are a State that has limited capacity. We have got a smaller population, obviously. But that also means that we have fewer hospitals. We have more limited means, in terms of our ability to care for those who have become very, very sick, and it is straining—it is really maxing out our hospitals to levels that we really just could not have even anticipated could happen.

As our hospitals are maxed out, it is not just the capacity, the number of people that you can put into your ICU; it is those who are daily doing the work of caring for those who are coming into our hospitals, coming in sicker and staying longer. We have maxed out our hospitals, and when I say "maxing out," in the Alaska vernacular, basically that means there is no room at the hospital. Our largest hospital is Providence, Alaska Regional, Mat-Su, Alaska Native Medical Center, Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, Bartlett—they are at capacity within their ICUs, and let me share with you what it means to be at capacity in your ICU.

I will share. I was at Alaska Regional just a weekend ago—actually, now two weekends ago—and I was told that their ICU, which is a 16-bed ICU, had been expanded to 20; and 100 percent of the beds, when I was there on that Saturday, were occupied by COVID patients with no room for anyone else to come to that particular medical facility.

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



Printed on recycled paper.

S6873

I had been at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital—actually there on an emergency, not myself but with another individual. We go to the emergency room, and as we were waiting for the doctors to come and address this non-COVID-related medical emergency, I was advised by the evening supervisor that Fairbanks Memorial Hospital was at capacity within their ICU. And what that meant was that Fairbanks Memorial was at capacity and, as of that evening, all of the other hospitals in Alaska that could care in an ICU capacity were filled. So I was told that my loved one may be in a situation, if he needed to be in the ICU, that I needed to prepare myself and others that he may be sent to Seattle or Portland that night. For those of you that don't know your geography there, that is a 3, 3½-hour flight by jet. It would have been a medevac. It is thousands of miles away.

That is what is happening in Alaska right now. When your hospitals are full, you just can't put them in an ambulance and take them to another town. We are taking these folks to another State. And, again, keep in mind, the reason that I was there that evening with this individual was not COVID-related, but that is the squeeze. That is the pressure that it puts on the rest of your system.

Just this week, the State is dealing with crisis standards of care guidelines as it relates to how individuals may receive monoclonal antibody treatments because the supplies are scarce out there.

So it is tough right now. It is tough. Beds are hard to find, and the extraordinary men and women who every day are going in and doing as best they can to provide for the level of care that is needed are doing so, but they are tired. They are tired. They can't get enough help. You have those who are exposed. You have to quarantine. It puts pressure on everybody else. People are running themselves to the ground.

But we have good news that is happening. Our Governor has been working to bring additional health workers in, and we are starting to see, just this week, as many as—we were hoping 500 but maybe a little bit less than that—nurses, respiratory therapists are starting to come to the State as part of a Federal contract. So you have got State-contracted healthcare workers. The Alaska Native Medical Center is going to be receiving additional support from a disaster medical assistance team. Again, we are at a point where you just can't take it on anymore. And our numbers have not yet peaked.

I don't share these statistics and I don't share the front page of the Daily News just to bring people up to speed as to what is happening in Alaska. That wasn't necessarily my purpose here.

My purpose this afternoon is, in the midst of this, in the midst of this real crisis in my State, when it comes to the availability of healthcare and re-

sponding to this virus that is killing—killing—Alaskans, killing Americans, killing people around the world, that we show a little kindness because right now that seems to be in as limited capacity as some of the hospitals that we have in Alaska. It is kindness and respect for where people are.

Your healthcare workers are giving every ounce of what they have to be there, to leave their families. They are worried about everybody. But they are there for us, and they are doing the best job possible. And some of what we see in return is not the best of America. It is not the best that Alaskans have to offer.

We have had some just horrible, horrible confrontations in our public meetings in Anchorage. The top of the fold in the Anchorage paper is about an assembly meeting where individuals wore yellow Stars of David to protest the mask ordinance that the Anchorage assembly was taking up, comparing the mask mandate to the Holocaust. It is shocking. At some of the assembly meetings—and it is not just in Anchorage, we are seeing it in other communities as well—it is neighbor against neighbor.

We have had providers go to provide testimony before in these public meetings, and not only have they been ridiculed and mocked, but we hear the stories, we read the stories that they have been spit upon. This is not how we show appreciation for those who are trying their absolute best to be there for us. And they will literally turn the other cheek and make sure that the care that they are providing in that ICU, in that ER, is without discrimination as to whether or not you have been vaccinated or not. They are going to be there to take care of you. So, please, can we please show some kindness to one another at these times of stress and of anxiety to families?

We in Alaska are pretty hardy. We are independent. We can handle things on our own, but we are better because we are also good neighbors to one another, more often than not.

When somebody's car breaks down by the side of the road, and it is cold and it is dark, we stop. We help them. We are there for them. When somebody is sick, we deliver the food. We are good neighbors. So we, in Alaska, need to remember to be that good neighbor to one another. We can have disagreements. We can have differing points of view. We can express them without degrading one another, without denigrating one another, without humiliating, and mocking one another.

So I know that we will be beyond COVID. It is not coming soon enough for any of us. But I just ask that as we go through this, in this State and around this country and around the world, that we remember that we are all better when we care for one another and we show a little kindness.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

RECESS SUBJECT TO THE CALL OF THE CHAIR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:50 p.m., recessed subject to the call of the Chair and reassembled at 8:05 p.m. when called to order by the President pro tempore.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 376, 386, 387, and 391; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

The nominations considered and confirmed are as follows:

IN THE AIR FORCE

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Air Force to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

To be general

Gen. Jacqueline D. Van Ovost

IN THE NAVY

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Navy to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

To be vice admiral

Vice Adm. Colin J. Kilrain

IN THE AIR FORCE

The following named officer for appointment to the grade indicated in the United States Air Force under title 10, U.S.C., section 624:

To be brigadier general

Col. James D. Brantingham

IN THE NAVY

The following named officer for appointment to the grade indicated in the United States Navy under section 905 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020:

To be rear admiral

Rear Adm. (lh) Jeffrey S. Scheidt