

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Linda Thomas-Greenfield, of Louisiana, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, with the rank and status of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and the Representative of the United States of America in the Security Council of the United Nations.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, it has only been a month since President Biden took the oath of office and Democrats assumed the majority in the Senate, but we have already taken some major steps to repair and rebuild our country.

I said this Chamber would begin its work by accomplishing three immediate tasks: confirming President Biden's nominees, addressing the COVID pandemic with bold legislation, and conducting a fair and honest impeachment trial of Donald Trump. The Senate has made steady progress on all three.

A little over a week ago, we concluded the second impeachment trial of Donald Trump. The House managers presented a powerful, harrowing reconstruction of the former President's role in inciting an attack against our democracy—the greatest offense ever—committed by a President of the United States. Despite the final verdict of this Chamber, Donald Trump deserves to be convicted, and I believe he will be convicted in the court of public opinion. History will judge Mr. Trump harshly, deservedly so, and everyone who condoned the dangerous final acts of his Presidency will live with that in history as well and live rather dishonorably.

Even during the impeachment trial, the Senate advanced the ball on the two other priorities I mentioned. Our committees conducted several confirmation hearings and worked closely with their House colleagues to draft COVID relief legislation. That process is ongoing among Senate Members, as well as over in the House. Now that the trial is complete, we are going to move forward on both fronts.

Democrats remain hard at work preparing the desperately needed COVID relief bill, which is on track to go to the President's desk before the March 14 expiration of unemployment insurance benefits, and starting this evening, the Senate will continue the process of confirming President Biden's

nominees with a vote on Linda Thomas-Greenfield to serve as the next U.N. Ambassador.

Ms. Thomas-Greenfield has spent three decades in the U.S. Foreign Service. She is exceptionally qualified, and that was reflected in the bipartisan support she received from the Foreign Relations Committee. If confirmed, she will assume the role of U.N. Ambassador at a time when the nations of the world must deepen their cooperation on the fight against COVID-19 and the fight against climate change, among other critical priorities. She will have no time to waste in rebuilding America's reputation and reasserting the first instrument of American power—diplomacy. I look forward to voting in favor of her nomination.

After that, the Senate will immediately proceed to the nomination of Tom Vilsack to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Vilsack is no stranger to the Senate confirmation process or to the Department of Agriculture in having served as its Secretary under President Obama. The former Governor of Iowa has made a career out of caring for and supporting our Nation's farmers. Mr. Vilsack was approved by the Agriculture Committee by a unanimous vote. I expect he will receive the same bipartisan reception by the full Senate.

For the rest of the week, we will continue to confirm Members of the President's Cabinet: first, Jennifer Granholm to serve as the Secretary of Energy; second, Dr. Miguel Cardona to serve as the Secretary of Education. Both nominees have been advanced by the respective committees with bipartisan votes—a pattern this week.

At a time when our Nation is gripped by a once-in-a-century crisis, the President deserves to have his nominees approved quickly by this Chamber so they can immediately get to work healing our great country.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on another matter entirely, today, the United States will surpass more than 500,000 deaths from COVID-19—a half a million souls.

How as a nation do we grapple with this enormous tragedy? How do we even comprehend a number that big or a loss that great? Do we imagine five of our largest football stadiums, filled to the max, wiped out in an instant? The city of Atlanta or Sacramento erased overnight? A 9/11 attack every single day for 169 days in a row?

They say a single death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. We must not let this tragic milestone wash over us like just another awful statistic stacked on top of a year's worth of awful statistics. Instead, we must treat this moment as 500,000 individual tragedies: the empty chair at the dinner table; the empty half of the bed at night that people are suffering through; the unplayed pianos and uncelebrated birthdays and funerals that were never held; the neighbors and colleagues and friends and family who

died without a chance for their loved ones to hold their hands; the grandchildren, wrapped in protective gear, waving goodbye to grandparents from across the silence of a hospital room—500,000 American souls and counting.

There is no way—no way—to properly account for the loss of so many lives in so short a time, but I would ask my fellow Americans to mark this terrible day by doing two simple things.

First, keep in your hearts the families who have lost a loved one. Reach out to that colleague or friend, and offer sympathy and support. Stop for a moment and grieve for your fellow citizens or for someone you have lost personally. We all know someone who is gone. I learned of another one yesterday.

And, second, let us strive to end this pandemic as swiftly as possible. For us in the Congress, that means moving forward with legislation to speed vaccine distribution and help the American people during this time of economic crisis, which is what the American Rescue Plan is all about, but every American can contribute by continuing to follow the guidelines and staying safe, by not losing hope or patience as we round the final corner.

We will—we will—get through this, but, today, let us mourn the 500,000 Americans we have lost and commit ourselves to a future when the days of these tragic milestones are finally and firmly behind us.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 9.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

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

The bill clerk read the nomination of Jennifer Mulhern Granholm, of Michigan, to be Secretary of Energy.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close the debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 9, Jennifer Mulhern Granholm, of Michigan, to be Secretary of Energy.

Charles E. Schumer, Cory A. Booker, Jon Ossoff, Richard Blumenthal, Richard J. Durbin, Alex Padilla, Christopher A. Coons, Margaret Wood Hassan, Sheldon Whitehouse, Robert Menendez, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Tim Kaine, Tammy Baldwin, Ron Wyden, Mazie Hirono, Tammy Duckworth.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I now ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume consideration of the Thomas-Greenfield nomination as provided under the previous order.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). The Republican leader is recognized.

KENTUCKY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, families across Kentucky are recovering from a week of punishing winter weather. As many as 154,000 Kentuckians lost heat and power, particularly across the eastern parts of the Commonwealth. Treacherous road conditions and fallen power lines made it a challenge to get help to those in need. Over the weekend, we learned that multiple lives were tragically lost in the aftermath of these storms, but as they always do, Kentuckians sprang into action.

Electric co-op linemen, first responders, and the Kentucky National Guard worked around the clock to clear debris and to restore power. Crews set up warming shelters and performed countless wellness checks. Churches, local businesses, and citizens distributed food, blankets, and other supplies.

So we are grateful for those who joined the response to help their neighbors and to help them stay safe.

Unfortunately, while temperatures are climbing above freezing, thousands remain without power. My staff and I continue to stay in close contact with local and State officials. Along with the rest of the Kentucky delegation, we are focused and ready to help in the recovery.

CORONAVIRUS

Now, on an entirely different matter, Madam President, the year just behind us will be remembered for the suffering, grief, and sacrifice it forced on our Nation.

Today, as our COVID-19 death toll passes 500,000, millions of Americans are feeling the pain of personal loss, but as we mark this terrible milestone, we stand here in early 2021 at what increasingly appears to be a crossroads. Far brighter days ahead appear to be close at hand.

So far, more than 63 million vaccine doses have been administered, and another 1.8 million Americans are now receiving a shot every day. At the same time, the rolling average of COVID-related deaths has fallen to barely half its January high, and mounting evidence suggests our economy is chomping at the bit to rebuild the prosperity we lost last year.

We reached this threshold because, in part, of the historic bipartisan work Congress built just last year—from the job-saving Paycheck Protection Program to Operation Warp Speed and its historically successful sprint toward vaccines, to cushioning the blow for unemployed Americans, and so much more.

We spent roughly \$4 trillion last year—the largest peacetime fiscal expansion in American history by far. And the five bills that passed the Senate passed 96 to 1, 90 to 8, 96 to 0, by voice vote, and 92 to 6.

That got us to the crossroads, with a truly terrible 12 months behind us but in a better position to move forward than many experts had predicted. Now the policies that Washington puts forward will help determine what kind of year 2021 will be for American families.

So are we destined to spend a second year in a national defensive crouch? Are we going to surrender another school year to the pandemic, another year of elevated unemployment, another year of diminished social and community life or—are we going to plant a flag and say this is the year that America comes roaring back? Are we going to make this the year we reclaim our lives and retake our country in a way that is safe and smart but determined?

Washington gets a major say on this, but, unfortunately, there seems to be some impulse on the Democratic side to act as though we are still stuck back in April of 2020, and we are going to be stuck there for all of 2021.

The partisan legislation Democrats are preparing to ram through looks like something you would pass to blunt another year of shutdowns, not to help guide a smart and proactive recovery. It looks more like another big bandage for a mostly shutdown country rather than a launching pad to help us get back on offense.

Look at schools. All the facts and hard evidence show that, with simple safety precautions, K-12 schools can and should be reopening safely right now. Yet the Biden administration is going out of its way to avoid getting kids back in school. They have their own experts contradicting their own recent statements and their own CDC backpedaling from the hard science, all to accommodate Big Labor's goalpost-moving.

Just look at the proposed money in their new partisan bill for K-12 schools. They call it an emergency relief fund, but just 5 percent of the money they want would be spent in fiscal year 2021. Ninety-five percent of this so-called

emergency relief for schools would go out in fiscal 2022 and beyond.

Take the economy, experts across the spectrum say that incomes, savings, job opportunities, and industry outlooks are already rebounding. Further aid needs to be smartly targeted so government doesn't get in the way.

But Democrats want to double down on bandaid policies like they are planning for another year of stagnation, instead of trying to set up success.

Almost every part of their draft reads like Democrats took the things they ideologically wanted to spend money on and worked backward, instead of starting with the actual state of the country, the actual needs of American families, and working toward that—not terribly surprising. Remember, one senior House Democrat told everybody last spring the pandemic would be “a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision.”

So I guess that is why they have gone heavy on non-COVID-related, liberal wish list items, like the job-killing minimum wage policy, the environmental justice grants, the wheelbarrows of cash for State and local governments, multiple times any serious estimate of remaining need, the attempts to expand taxpayer funding for abortions.

They go heavy on all of that but light on practical solutions to get kids back in school, workers safely back on the job, and help the American people reclaim their lives from this microscopic foreign invader.

The American people do not deserve policies that presume 2021 will be just like 2020. Our Nation needs this year to be different.

If the administration were interested in policies to make that happen, they would find the same kind of bipartisan support that every historic COVID-19 package has received so far.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The senior Senator from Illinois.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, yesterday would have been John Lewis's 81st birthday. That a fearless young man, who was threatened, jailed, beaten half to death so many times for the cause of love and justice, actually lived to reach the age of 80 seems like a miracle.

Now, as America celebrates our first Black History Month since his passing, we miss him, but we still have the moral force of his message. John made sure of that. Two days before he died, he wrote an essay for the New York Times. He asked the paper to print his words on the day of his funeral—of his “homegoing,” as he said. It was his last message to America.