

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.

In his essay John Lewis recalled how, when he was a little boy in Alabama, the threat of White supremacist violence and government-sanctioned terror was a fact of everyday life.

He also remembered the moment that changed his life: hearing a young minister named Martin Luther King, Jr., on the radio. From Dr. King's sermons he learned about the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence. He also learned that when we tolerate injustice, we are complicit.

When we see something that is wrong, he wrote, "each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out."

John Lewis spent the next 65 years on Earth following Dr. King's teachings. I never met anyone in my life so unshakably committed to nonviolence and the transformative power of love.

There was another person who inspired John Lewis to spend his life getting into what he called "good trouble." He said he was inspired into the movement to end America's brutal history of race discrimination by the brutal death of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955. When Emmett Till was brutally murdered for supposedly whistling at a White woman, he was only 14 years old. John Lewis was 15.

Emmett Till had traveled to Mississippi that summer to visit relatives from his home on the South Side of Chicago. When his body was returned to his grieving mother, Mamie Till, she made a decision that changed the world. She demanded that her son's coffin remain open at his funeral so that the world could see what hatred and racism had done to her only child.

Emmett Till's murder and Mamie Till's courage launched the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century. It was one of the greatest periods of racial reckoning in our Nation's history. Just 3 months later, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, AL, bus. She said that she thought of Emmett Till, and that courage covered her like a quilted blanket.

Earlier this month, the city of Chicago designated the home in which Emmett and Mamie Till lived as a city historical site. There are plans to preserve it as a museum.

Five years ago, the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture opened in Washington, DC. It represents America's first official attempt to tell the story of African Americans. But you don't have to go to a museum to see evidence of racial injustice in America or to see people bravely getting into "good trouble" for justice. You see that all around us.

Nine days before he died, weak from his chemo treatment, John Lewis made his last public appearance at the newly renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza in front of the White House. He explained the reason for his visit in his final letter to America. It begins with these words: "While my time here has now come to an end, I want you to know that in the last days and hours of my

life you inspired me. You filled me with hope about the next chapter of the great American story when you used your power to make a difference in our society."

Lewis went on: "That is why I had to visit Black Lives Matter Plaza in Washington. . . . I just had to see and feel it for myself that, after many years of silent witness, the truth is still marching on."

John Lewis drew a direct line from the civil rights movement to the Black Lives Matter protest of today, and he said: "Emmett Till was my George Floyd. He was my Rayshard Brooks, Sandra Bland and Breonna Taylor."

As we celebrate this month, we can see the ravages of racial injustice in this pandemic, which has hit our Black and Brown brothers and sisters with a disproportionate ferocity. African Americans still live sicker and die younger in America. The average Black family still possesses only a fraction of the wealth of White families, even after a lifetime of backbreaking work. African Americans still face voter suppression and intimidation a half-century after John Lewis fought for voting rights.

Just weeks ago, White nationalists helped lead an armed insurrection against our democracy, and a man in that mob paraded a Confederate battle flag through the halls of this Capitol. We have work to do.

Truly, we have things to celebrate. Black history in America is a record of brutal subjugation, racial violence, and discrimination, but it is also the story of resilient people who survived those horrors and created a rich and vibrant culture. From Crispus Attucks, the first American who gave his life in the Revolutionary War, to Officer Eugene Goodman, one of the heroes in the January 6 insurrection; from Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman to Vice President KAMALA HARRIS; from the enslaved people who built this Capitol and the White House to Barack Obama, our first Black President; from John Lewis, the youngest speaker at the March on Washington, to Amanda Gordon, the youngest inaugural poet in our Nation's history, African Americans have enriched America in every field of thought and every walk of life and made us freer, more prosperous, and truer to our founding promises. I celebrate Black History Month.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

NOMINATION OF THOMAS J. VILSACK

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, tomorrow we are going to be taking up the nomination of former Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack and former Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and now the nominee to be Secretary of Agriculture again.

I fully support this nomination. He has received support from farm and commodity groups across the country, but, more important to this Senator, he received praise from family farmers

in Iowa. However, a few critics of the former Iowa Governor have raised questions about his record on addressing racial inequities during his time as Secretary of Agriculture from 2009 until 2017. I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

I have long worked toward ensuring Black farmers receive justice for the decades of discrimination that occurred through many different administrations of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, both Republican and Democratic.

People have often asked me why in the world a Senator from Iowa would get involved in this issue. While there aren't many Black farmers in Iowa, my State has a long history of fighting against oppression of African Americans dating to the Underground Railroad. There is no reason to stop that trend.

In my first discussion with then-to-be Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack in 2009, I brought up my work in what is called the Pigford consent decree. A provision I led in the 2008 farm bill enabled more Black farmers to bring their claims forward and authorized the U.S. Department of Agriculture \$100 million for additional settlements.

Mr. Vilsack at that time, talking to me privately, vowed then to work closely with me and other Senators on issues and then immediately got to work doing just that, helping Black farmers. Under the leadership of Secretary Vilsack, the U.S. Department of Agriculture discovered that the \$100 million at that time appropriated wasn't enough to cover the settlements that Black farmers were entitled to under that consent decree, so in 2010, part of Secretary Vilsack's budget request included over \$1 billion to ensure a robust settlement for all Black farmers who were discriminated against for the previous two or three decades. The Claims Resolution Act was signed by President Obama in December 2010 and implemented successfully by Secretary Vilsack.

Besides the Pigford settlements, a top priority during Secretary Vilsack's previous tenure was ensuring a comprehensive plan to improve the USDA's record on civil rights, and that record on civil rights wasn't very good based upon what I have already said about the Pigford case but in a lot of other areas as well. Secretary Vilsack made it clear to all employees that discrimination of any form would not be tolerated at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

My support for justice for those who have faced discrimination remains constant, and I am looking forward to working with Secretary Vilsack and leaders in the Congress to ensure equal rights for every farmer and family in this country.

I am glad to have the opportunity to set the record straight on Secretary Tom Vilsack's solid record in pursuing justice for victims of discrimination.

Mr. Vilsack is the right person for this job. I know that Secretary Vilsack