

ought to be leading the world in. The same goes for building out 5G, the next-generation telecommunications network. There is bipartisan interest on both these issues.

Overall, the new legislation must achieve three goals: one, boost American competitiveness by investing in our economy and our workers; two, leverage our alliances abroad; and, three, stop once and for all China's predatory practices. A number of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle have strong bipartisan ideas on these issues, including Senators MENENDEZ and RISCH, BROWN and TOOMEY, CANTWELL and WICKER. I hope we can all work together to craft a bill that meets that moment.

It is my intention to put this legislation on this topic on the Senate floor for a vote this spring. I urge the committees to continue their work in a bipartisan way so we can have strong legislation before us.

It so happens that today, at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, significant work will be done on the same issues. President Biden has invited a bipartisan group of lawmakers to the White House to discuss concerns with the U.S. supply chain, particularly the semiconductor shortage, and will sign an Executive order aimed at plugging the holes. I applaud both the meeting and the Executive order. The new administration is taking a strong first step in shoring up America's critical supply chains and putting a spotlight on American competitiveness.

PROTESTS

Mr. President, finally, I want to commend the Rules Committee and the Homeland Security Committee yesterday for holding an important hearing examining the attack on January 6, a horrible, horrible attack. It was the first of what will be many examinations of the events on January 6 and how we can prevent such an attack from ever happening again.

The hearing revealed several security and communication failures that must be addressed going forward and followed up on in future investigations. Regrettably, the hearing also revealed that there are still Members of the Senate Republican minority who are willing to continue the campaign of misinformation, deception, and conspiracy that helped fuel the attack on January 6 in the first place.

Let me be very clear. Blaming the January 6 attack on provocateurs and fake Trump protesters is mindless garbage. It has no basis in fact. Perpetuating and giving a platform to those lies is a preposterous contribution to a Senate hearing devoted to Capitol security. Everyone—everyone needs to move forward by sticking to the facts and engaging in a very serious discussion about the security of the Capitol Complex.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, I discussed the K-12 crisis facing American families. The science shows that in-person schooling can easily be made safe. Private and religious schools and schools in Europe have been open for months.

But Washington Democrats have apparently bought into Big Labor's myth that schools cannot reopen without even more Federal funding, even though their own plan would only spend about 5 percent—5 percent of the money this fiscal year.

This is just one illustration of how Democrats started with preconceived ideological goals and actually worked backward, instead of starting with the actual needs of American families.

Let's take a look at the economy. When we had to stall our economy to protect our health system, the Senate wrote the bipartisan CARES Act, the biggest rescue package in American history. It spent \$2.2 trillion to save the healthcare system, find vaccines, and support families. We refilled many of those programs with another \$920 billion just last December.

Today, we stand at a very different kind of crossroads. More than 13 percent of Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine. Manufacturers expect vaccine supply to keep ramping up dramatically in the weeks ahead.

The trillions we spent on rescue policies in 2020 had the economy prepped to come roaring back as health conditions keep improving.

Unemployment today is already lower than where, at one point in this crisis, the Federal Reserve predicted it would be by the end of the year. In some blue-collar sectors, both total employment and job openings are already higher than they were before the pandemic. Retail sales just smashed experts' predictions. Many manufacturers can't keep pace with demand.

Remarkably, even as economic output obviously shrunk in 2020, overall household personal income and personal savings actually went up. That is because of the relief Congress delivered.

There is no question that some American families are still struggling. Nobody thinks our health or economic fight is finished yet, but on a broad national scale, households are sitting on an historic pile of pent-up cash, waiting for the economy to reopen.

The former head of President Obama's Council of Economic Advisers says:

We have no historic parallel with anything like this level of excess saving.

He says we have never seen this much "dry powder."

Even mainstream liberal economists agree that our country does not need another massive fire hose of borrowed money. This is not April of 2020. This is a different chapter. Washington should focus on practical policies to finish this fight: accelerate vaccinations; get kids back in school; help the families and small businesses that actually need help; and get laid-off Americans matched with job openings ASAP.

Unfortunately, the Democrats' partisan proposal would not just be wasteful but, in certain ways, actually counterproductive. It would have Washington go out of its way to discourage hiring, discourage a return to work, and actually keep things shut down longer.

Take the minimum wage policy. The CBO says this abrupt, one-size-fits-all change would kill about 1½ times as many jobs as the number of workers it would lift out of poverty.

Or take their proposal for another long-term extension of a big Federal supplement to unemployment benefits. Even in the middle of last year, it was questionable policy to pay people more to stay home than essential workers were earning while actually on the job. Now another long-term, flat supplement would make even less sense.

Here is how one leading economist puts it:

In an expanding economy that is putting the virus behind it, paying people more in unemployment than they could receive from working is an act of substantial economic self-harm. It would keep workers on the sidelines, stop the unemployment rate from falling as rapidly as it otherwise would, and slow the overall recovery.

Then there is the \$350 billion bailout for State and local governments, many of whom have already seen revenues and receipts rebound. It is several multiples of any sober estimate of the actual need. Apparently, even Senators on the Democratic side are trying to pare back this absurd request—just one more way this proposal seems to be stuck back in April of last year.

I haven't even talked about the hundreds of millions of dollars for pet projects without a shred of relevance to the pandemic or the recovery—money for "climate justice," transportation earmarks for the Democratic leader's home State—all kinds of liberal wish list items that would do nothing to help American families put COVID behind them. Just about 1 percent of the money is for vaccines, so either the new administration has completely taken their eye off the ball or they were not actually starting from scratch at all, like they claimed. Only 5 percent of the education funding would even go out this fiscal year. Only 5 percent of the education funding would go out this fiscal year.

Our own Senate Democratic colleagues are reportedly admitting parts

of this are poorly targeted. Liberal economists and the Washington Post's editorial board are saying Americans deserve more bang for their buck—a predictably chilly reception for a partisan bill that started with an outdated, ideological wish list instead of the current needs of American families.

PROTESTS

Now, Mr. President, on a completely different matter, I have been outspoken and clear about the crimes that were committed here on January 6. In my discussions with Judge Garland, the President's nominee to be Attorney General, I specifically raised the need to continue investigating and prosecuting anyone who broke the law that day. I am glad he has repeatedly emphasized this would remain a priority. Everyone agrees that day's events must occasion a serious and thorough review of the specific institutions and security procedures within Congress that proved so insufficient. That process is already underway as we saw with the joint hearing conducted yesterday by two Senate committees.

The Speaker of the House proposes even more investigation through a new commission. She cites the precedent of the 9/11 Commission, but her draft bill fails to track with that precedent in key ways.

The 9/11 Commission was intentionally built to be bipartisan. The 50-50 bipartisan split of the commissioners was a key feature. It both helped the effectiveness of the investigation itself and helped give the whole country confidence in its work and its recommendations. This time, however, Speaker PELOSI started by proposing a commission that would be partisan by design—seven appointments for Democrats, just four for Republicans. The 9/11 Commission also built consensus by requiring bipartisan support for subpoenas. The Speaker's bill would vest subpoena power in one appointee chosen by the Democrats.

Both the Democratic and Republican leaders of the 9/11 Commission are speaking out against this bizarrely partisan concept. Let me say that again. The leaders of the 9/11 Commission—one Republican, one Democrat—are speaking out against the way this proposal is crafted by the Speaker.

Lee Hamilton, the Democratic Vice Chairman of the 9/11 Commission, says:

That does not sound to me like a good start; it sounds like a partisan beginning.

That was the Democratic Vice Chairman of the 9/11 Commission.

Tom Kean, the Republican Chairman, pointed out what should be obvious:

Unless you have equal representation . . . the report won't have as much confidence from the American people.

Any undertaking along these lines needs to be fair and needs to be even-handed. That really shouldn't be controversial, and it goes beyond just a makeup of the panel.

For example, the Speaker's proposal imagines something more than an in-

vestigation into the specific security failures that occurred here at the Capitol. It sets the stage for a somewhat broader inquiry into "domestic violent extremism" beyond just that day, but the partisan panel would get to decide which other incidents are and are not "relevant."

Rioting and political violence are abhorrent and unacceptable no matter what cause the mob is advancing. These are not forms of political speech. For almost a year now, we have seen political violence and riots become an increasingly normalized phenomenon across our national life. None of us should accept that.

January 6 was uniquely grave because the intent was to interrupt the constitutional duty of Congress, but if this new commission is to go beyond a targeted, after-action analysis of the security failures here at the Capitol complex and if Congress is going to attempt some broader analysis of toxic political violence across the country, then, in that case, we cannot have an artificial cherry-picking of which terrible behavior does and which terrible behavior does not deserve scrutiny. We could do something narrow that looks at the Capitol or we could potentially do something broader to analyze the full scope of the political violence here in our country. We cannot land at some artificial, politicized halfway point.

Don't take it from me. Take it from the Democratic and Republican leaders of the 9/11 Commission. An inquiry with a hard-wired partisan slant would never be legitimate in the eyes of the American people. An undertaking that is uneven or unjust would not help our country.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The assistant majority leader.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, I was home, as most Members of the Senate were, but I was asked to participate in a Zoom call with two people I highly respect, Dr. Anthony Fauci and Dr. Collins, with the National Institutes of Health. While sitting at my dining room table in Springfield, IL, there were about a dozen Senators who had access to Zoom to be a part of that conversation. I felt like I was privileged to really hear some information which most Americans wanted to hear, and I knew it had to be important for them to ask for a briefing in the middle of the week.

What they were talking about during the course of that hour were variants, what is happening to this coronavirus as it replicates over and over and over again millions of times. What they told us—and I am a liberal arts lawyer, so I don't profess any sort of medical expertise here—was that there were dominant variants that were starting to emerge, and they told us the shorthand description that they used in the laboratories.

I just remember that the first one was the UK, United Kingdom, variant.

They said, by the end of March, which is not that far away—4 weeks plus—it will be the dominant strain of coronavirus in the United States. I was taken aback by that to think that a variant could become that dominant that quickly, but it was fair warning that it was about to occur. Then they talked about the South African variant, which is just starting to appear.

The good news is they have done enough testing to believe that both of the major vaccines we are now using across America, which are Moderna and Pfizer—I have Pfizer, and my wife has Moderna—are effective against the UK, United Kingdom, variant. The jury is still out when it comes to the South African variant. There is a third variant, and I won't venture into trying to remember exactly what that was about, but I remember it had some origin in South America.

I heard that news, and I thought to myself, this is an ongoing battle. We haven't run up any kind of score against this coronavirus. We can't sit back and relax. We are in a very busy third quarter in trying to vaccinate America and in watching for each and every new threat.

So, in that circumstance, if you were the President of the United States, what would you do?

Well, Joe Biden, President Joe Biden, decided that we needed to be aggressive, that we needed to face reality, not only with regard to the half a million Americans who have died but that we need to put together the tools to fight this coronavirus as we know it and as it is likely to evolve. He needs an army to do that. It is that big a war. He came to us with a proposal to start that effort, in a substantial way, under his leadership. He calls it the American Rescue Plan. I hear my colleagues come to the floor and really raise the question as to whether this is needed, and I just heard the speech of the minority leader, Senator MCCONNELL.

What President Biden wants to do to deal with this pandemic, as we know it and as it is likely to evolve, is to provide \$20 billion more for our vaccination program. Does anyone doubt the need for that? I don't. I think it is the key to getting America back to business.

He provides \$50 billion for testing, lab capacity improvements, and genomic sequencing of this virus mutation. Again, I am not an expert in science, but it seems perfectly reasonable to me, after listening to Drs. Fauci and Collins, to make that investment right now.

President Biden wants to invest in 100,000 community health workers to help with the vaccinations and contact tracing—100,000. It seems like a lot, but in a nation of 350 million, I am not sure it is that overwhelming a number. He wants to fund the community health centers so that they will be able to tackle this issue and particularly address the issue of health disparities;