

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Kristi Haskins Johnson, of Mississippi, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Mississippi.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I am struck by the fact, as I call people around my State of Vermont, which, like your State and every State, has suffered from COVID—although I compliment our Republican Governor, who has kept the numbers down lower than practically any other State in the country. But we are facing winter, and even today, the outgoing President does not seem to be willing to acknowledge the huge mistake he made in not accepting the fact that we had a COVID pandemic coming to this country. We lost too much time preparing for it. We are still not adequately prepared for it. We could take some hope in the news of new vaccinations, but even that is going to take months before than can be fully implemented.

The reason I mention this is that the Senate time and again is voting on judicial nominees who have been recommended predominantly by a special interest group or a couple of different special interest groups. We have to vote on these special interest judges for lifetime appointments, but we can't do a single thing to help the average people who are suffering because of COVID. It should not be a Republican or a Democratic issue.

In my State, I hear from business people who have small B&Bs, may have a restaurant and a small business—they don't identify themselves as Republicans or Democrats; they just say: We can't open. What are we going to do?

I hear from parents who say: What is being done so our kids can go back to school? The schools say they could probably do something, but they need the money to set up various COVID protections.

Small hospitals are overwhelmed. We have seen this in States all over the country. The hospitals are being overwhelmed, and the people working there are being overwhelmed.

The U.S. Senate hasn't done a single thing. We had a bill before us from the House in June and July. We could have voted on it. The Republican leader said: No, we can't, because there are some parts we Republicans may not like. Well, that is why you vote. Bring it up. Vote it up or vote it down. Bring up amendments. Vote for them or vote against them, but do it. Instead, we spend our time day after day after day

voting on special interest judges—people who have been proposed by special interests groups, who are picked because they feel they would vote with these special interests groups. What we should be doing is taking a little time off from that and voting for the American people.

In my State, we have Republicans and Democrats. We have a Republican Governor who is doing an excellent job. He has just been reelected. We have a wonderful Democratic woman who has been elected as the new Lieutenant Governor. They both want to work together to get people back to school, back to work, protect their health. They keep saying: When is the help coming from Washington?

I think that instead of spending all of this time talking about fanciful thoughts—I saw one of the Trump supporters on television saying that she was there to rally for Donald Trump, to resist those millions of votes that came in at the last minute from China, into these voting booths. She thoroughly believed it, and she seemed like a really intelligent person. But let's talk about reality.

The reality is that COVID did not go away in the spring, as the President said. The reality is that you have to wear masks. The reality is that you have to take steps to keep from getting COVID. The reality is that our schools are suffering, our families are suffering, our small businesses are suffering, our government agencies are suffering—America is suffering.

I think about a few years ago when we had the Ebola plague, and the Obama administration put in place, with strong bipartisan support, a special unit at the White House to react to plagues or serious novel diseases coming here. As a result, America was protected. But what we also did, as America does best, is we helped other countries to handle the question of Ebola.

What did we do when this administration came in? Well, because President Obama set up that infectious disease unit, they quickly disbanded it. For months, as these reports were coming in making it very clear we were facing a serious threat to the United States, they ignored it and refused to acknowledge it. Now at least they have acknowledged it somewhat but are unwilling to take the steps necessary to fight it.

So I suggest that the U.S. Senate do its job. Hold off for a while on these special interest judges and actually vote for the things that help people who don't have special interests—the vast majority of Republicans and Democrats, men and women, families throughout the United States of America. Do something to help them. Bring up the bills. Bring up the COVID bills. Bring up the appropriations bills. Certainly, Senator SHELBY and I are prepared to bring them to the floor. If people don't like a particular bill, then bring up an amendment. Vote it up or down. What are we afraid of? Why are

we afraid to vote? Vote it up or down. Let the American people see what we are doing.

Certainly, I do not know a single person, Republican or Democrat, in my State who would tell me: Well, I would much rather have you vote on these special interest judges than to vote on things that might actually help us keep our businesses from closing, help us be able to afford our kids going to school, help us put food on our table.

That is what we should be doing. Let's vote on real things. Let's vote on the COVID appropriations. Let's vote on the help. Let's bring up our appropriations bills. After all, in just a few weeks, all funding for the government stops. Bring it up and vote on it. Vote up or down. If people don't want to fund the government, then vote no. If they want to fund the government, vote yes. If they don't like a particular part of the funding package, bring up an amendment and have the courage to put your name on it and then vote up or down.

I will speak further on this as we go on. I see one of my colleagues on the floor. I think he wants to speak.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from the Kansas.

RISER ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I am on the floor this afternoon to encourage us in the U.S. Senate to address at least some of the needs related to the consequences of COVID-19.

There is a deadline that is fast approaching. This problem was created in the statute by legislation that was passed, the CARES Act. I have introduced legislation called the RISER Act to offer a solution to the issue I am about to describe.

As COVID-19 has swept across the country, businesses and community institutions have been forced to adapt to the virus, fundamentally changing the way in which they operate. More people are working from home today than ever before, while others are being asked to dedicate increased resources for public health precautions and support management. Virtual education and healthcare have also expanded greatly as communities are forced to conduct ordinary functions from afar to prevent the spread of the disease.

Adapting to the realities of this newly virtual economy is costly. To aid in this transition, as part of the CARES Act, Congress established the Coronavirus Relief Fund, or CRF. It is a multibillion-dollar fund for State and local governments to disburse, covering a variety of expenses that have arisen due to COVID-19. Expenses that can be paid from the CRF funds include providing small businesses and other organizations with grants to reimburse them for costs associated with handling coronavirus.

This funding was partly intended to address immediate, unforeseen costs absorbed by our public emergency officials and healthcare providers. Kansas