

## 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

counties' health departments have increasingly relied on this funding to ensure they are able to meet the needs of their community now and into the future as this pandemic stretches on.

Many States, including my own of Kansas, have also established forward-looking programs to distribute grants for economic development projects that respond to COVID-19, such as telemedicine, tele-education projects, and projects that would improve broadband infrastructure in rural and underserved areas. These communities already face a sharp divide in terms of broadband availability, and this pandemic has highlighted that. Unfortunately, for all the work we have accomplished in spreading the use of broadband, the availability of broadband, increasing its connectivity, there are still plenty of areas that need to be improved for access to quality internet services.

As more broadband-intensive work like video conferencing and virtual appointments now takes place at a much higher rate, the urgency to improve these services increases. Rural communities stand to lose the most without these types of projects.

Many of the projects require long lead times to wisely plan, appropriate, and expend Federal funding. However—and here is the problem—the CARES Act mandates that CRF funds be spent by the end of this year, now just a little more than a month away. This is absolutely not enough time for preparation-intensive projects to be carefully planned and executed. The current deadline puts several long-term economic development plans at risk of losing funding if they are not completed by December 31, and it also prevents new, meaningful proposals from being considered in the first place.

Many Kansans—from our county health departments to our universities, to our schools, to our cities and counties, to mayors and county commissioners whom I have visited with—have urged us to extend this looming deadline. We need to have a longer period of time so that the Federal dollars are not spent—I always try to avoid using the phrase “Federal dollars.” They are really taxpayer dollars or borrowed money that has to be paid back by taxpayers. It is a silly proposition that we would require the money to be spent when what it will mean is we will spend money less effectively and less efficiently than we otherwise would in the absence of this near-term deadline.

That is why Senator ROBERTS and I have introduced the Remove Impediments for a Successful Economic Recovery Act, or RISER. This bill would extend that deadline for State and local governments by 2 years for a set of currently eligible expenditures that meet criteria for qualified economic development plans.

This bill would allow funds for critical projects that require additional attention and time for a more thoughtful investment to be spent more effectively without cutting short a strategic

investment that Congress made back in March to support our communities that need it the most.

I believe that State and local governments know what is best for their communities, including where and when to spend these Federal dollars.

Extending the relief for CRF payments dedicated to, particularly, job creation projects will allow Kansas and other States to strategically target areas of need over a longer period of time, making more certain that our taxpayer dollars are making the greatest impact to help our people recover from this pandemic. This will better ensure that the areas in need identified by States and localities have a stable source of investment that will aid in the ongoing economic recovery.

That said, I remain engaged with the Treasury and Senate Finance Committee to improve the RISER Act to ensure the availability of bipartisan support. This is a bill I want to pass, not a bill I just want to introduce.

While this thoughtful discussion with Treasury and the Finance Committee continues, I recognize that Congress must urgently act to extend the deadline in the meantime.

While I have a particular bill that does things that I think are hugely important in this arena, I also recognize that we don't have the time to wait. Often throughout these few days that I have been home, away from Washington, DC, I have been asked: How is your legislation coming? The answer is: There is broad bipartisan support. Most Senators—most Republican Senators and most Democratic Senators—are supportive of this measure, but the issue is: Will we be able to extend the deadline in time for our local units of government to know that they have an additional amount of time, or, in the absence of that, will we allow them or require them to spend money in ways less effective or efficient than they otherwise would?

I know that there are other pieces of legislation introduced by a few of my colleagues that would offer what we would call a clean extension of the CRF deadline, and I urge my Senate colleagues to support the immediate enactment of these legislative proposals to provide flexibility in fostering meaningful investments in our home States.

Around here, too often, it seems that if we can't do everything to solve a problem, we do nothing to solve a problem. I have never understood that attitude or approach. The things that we can agree on—and this is one, I think, on which we can, this extension of the deadline—we ought not wait for a larger package that continues to be negotiated between the White House and Speaker PELOSI or between Republican and Democratic leadership in the Senate or the Republican leadership with the Democratic leadership in the House.

Whatever the negotiations ongoing today to get us to a point in which we

are addressing what we generally call phase 4, another effort to improve the opportunities for us to provide relief to our constituents due to the pandemic—whatever all those machinations are—they will not happen quickly enough, and they certainly will not happen quickly enough to make certain that our local officials and their citizens know that they no longer would need to spend the money that we have provided them in the next 5 or 6 weeks.

By including the coronavirus relief fund in the CARES Act, Congress extended a hand to States, local governments, and areas in need across the country that are looking to adapt to the new realities of the ongoing pandemic. In the absence of an extension of the deadline, money will be misspent and will certainly not be spent in the most effective and valuable way.

I urge my colleagues not only to support the legislation that I have introduced, the RISER Act, but to work with others—all of us—to come to a point in which we are capable this week—if it doesn't get done this week, it probably means very little in an extension—to this week pass an extension beyond December 31 for the use of those CARES dollars in States across the Nation.

I urge my colleagues to join my legislation. I urge my colleagues to join to ensure that the hand we offered under the CARES Act won't be withdrawn way too soon. I am thankful for the opportunity to address my colleagues in the Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ERNST). The Senator from Iowa.

REMEMBERING ROGER JEPSEN

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, today I pay tribute to our former colleague and my friend, former U.S. Senator Roger Jepsen. Roger Jepsen passed away last Friday, at age 91, at Clarissa C. Cook Hospice House in Quad Cities, IA.

An Iowa native and an American patriot, Roger devoted his life in service to his family, faith, and community. He spent his youth on his family farm near Cedar Falls, about 5 miles from where I was born and grew up. I still reside within 4 miles of the farmhouse where I was born.

Regardless of the close proximity of us as young people, I didn't become acquainted with Roger until he represented Scott County in the Iowa Legislature. I wish I had known him earlier when we were neighbors, as children.

For 14 years, Roger served our country in the U.S. Army. He was a paratrooper in the 82nd Airborne Division, and then he later served in the Army Reserve.

Roger worked for 20 years in the life insurance business and was a member of the National Association of Life Underwriters. Along the way, Roger answered the call to public service and civic leadership. For more than two