



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

Vol. 167

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2021

No. 138

Senate

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable RAPHAEL WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God our shield, look with love upon us today. Enable us to go from strength to strength as we strive to live in day-tight compartments. Guide our Senators around the obstacles that hinder them from living for Your glory. As they seek to fulfill Your purposes for their lives, empower them to stand for right and leave the consequences to You.

Lord, give them the grace to seek You with their whole hearts, knowing that those who passionately pursue You will find You. May they daily surrender themselves to You through prayer and obedience as they remember that victory comes from You.

We pray in Your loving Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The senior legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, August 3, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable RAPHAEL WARNOCK, a Senator from the State of Georgia, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. WARNOCK thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. 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. SCHUMER. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Senators continue to work through the bipartisan infrastructure bill here on the floor. Members from both sides want to be able to consider as many germane amendments as possible, but we want to work efficiently to allow those votes.

Yesterday was a positive day in that respect. Democrats and Republicans agreed to vote on three amendments, two of which were led by Republicans. Two bipartisan amendments—one led by Senators THUNE and TILLIS, another led by Senators PADILLA and MORAN—were adopted with over 90 votes.

We have one—potentially two—more amendment votes lined up this morning. We can hold even more amendment votes today if our Republican colleagues grant us the consent to do so.

The bottom line is this: The Senate can work through amendments rather efficiently when we have cooperation between the majority and the minority, as we have had in this bipartisan legislation. It can go rather slowly, of course, without that cooperation. In either case, the Senate is going to stay here until we finish our work.

I will conclude my remarks now in order to give time to the other Members waiting to speak, but I will come back to the floor shortly afterwards to join the chair and ranking member of the Rules Committee asking the Senate to award the Congressional Gold Medal to members of the Capitol Police force who defended us from a violent mob on January 6.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

INVESTING IN A NEW VISION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND SURFACE TRANSPORTATION IN AMERICA ACT

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3684, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3684) to authorize funds for Federal-aid highways, highway safety programs, and transit programs, and for other purposes.

Pending:

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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S5683

Schumer (for SINEMA) amendment No. 2137, in the nature of a substitute.

Carper-Capito amendment No. 2131 (to amendment No. 2137), to strike a definition.

Schumer (for LUMMIS) amendment No. 2181 (to amendment No. 2137), to require the Secretary of Transportation to carry out a highway cost allocation study.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maine.

JANUARY 6

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, while we are awaiting others to come to the Senate floor, let me express my deep sorrow about learning of the deaths of two more police officers who responded to safeguard all of us in the Capitol on January 6.

My heart goes out to their families and their fellow officers, both here on Capitol Hill and also in the District of Columbia police force.

I am wearing a button that was given to me several years ago after the Capitol Police, once again, acted heroically. It says: "Thank you, Capitol Police."

I hope each and every one of us will take time today to thank these courageous men and women who are working so hard to keep us safe and many of whom still bear the physical injuries and the emotional trauma of that dark day in our Nation's history.

H.R. 3684

Mr. President, I would like now to turn to briefly speak about the broadband provisions that are included in the infrastructure package. My friend and colleague Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN, from New Hampshire, and I worked with a number of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to craft this package.

The pandemic that we have endured for more than a year laid bare the disparities in access to high-speed internet. It made it difficult for children to be educated online, impossible for some individuals to work at home, and removed the possibility of telemedicine consultations for some of our sick and seniors.

The fact is that approximately 19 million Americans still lack access to high-speed internet. We talk a lot in this bill about bridges and building bridges, and we do need to do that. Well, it is time for us to bridge America's digital divide and build a 21st-century broadband infrastructure that will meet our country's needs not only today but for years to come, to be future-proof, if you will.

The bipartisan infrastructure plan invests \$65 billion to address our Nation's digital divide once and for all, and I would note that that is in addition to the previous funding that we provided in the COVID bills to help bridge the digital divide.

Also, in the March \$1.9 trillion bill, there is language that was authored by Senator MANCHIN that allows States to use some of the allocation that they receive to invest in broadband. In addition, I am hopeful that we will consider and adopt an amendment that Senator

CORNYN has authored that will give more flexibility to States to invest in broadband, using some of the allocation that they received.

Our bill, the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, would provide more than \$42 billion in grants to States for deployment. It does not favor particular technologies or providers, and projects would have to meet a minimum download-upload build standard of 100 over 20 megabits per second.

The funding includes a 10-percent set-aside for high-cost areas, and each State, territory, and the District of Columbia would receive an initial minimum allocation, a portion of which could be used for technical assistance and supporting or establishing a State broadband office. In my State of Maine, the Governor has used some of those COVID funds in order to establish a new Maine Connect Authority that will be very helpful.

States would be required to prioritize deployment in unserved areas first. That is so important. Then they could move to underserved areas.

I talked to a selectman recently from Swans Island off the coast of Maine. They desperately need access to broadband services, and they do not have it. I am thinking of what a difference it would make to the lives of the people who live on that island. I have also talked to people in Northern Maine, for example, in the town of Easton, ME, where one family told me that it would cost \$15,000 for them to be connected to the internet. They don't have that kind of money. Few people in Maine do.

That is why there is another part of our bill that speaks to affordability, and in this provision, we plussed up to \$14.2 billion. Additional funds would be devoted to subsidize broadband service for eligible households that meet needs-based criteria. An example would be eligibility for school lunches. This allocation of funds is so important to rural America as well as unserved areas in our inner cities.

The bill that we have before us includes \$2 billion to support programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including the ReConnect Program that provides loans and grants or a combination to fund the construction, acquisition, and improvement of facilities and equipment that provides broadband service in rural areas.

Supplementing that are private activity funds, where \$600 million has been allocated. This is based on a bill that was introduced by Senator HASSAN and Senator CAPITO, another bipartisan bill that is called the Rural Broadband Financing Flexibility Act. It would allow States to issue private activity bonds to finance broadband deployment, specifically, for projects in rural areas where a majority of the households do not have access to broadband.

We also included an additional \$2 billion for the Tribal Broadband

Connectivity Program, which was established by the COVID bill that we passed in December and is administered by the NTIA in the Department of Commerce.

Grants from this program will be made eligible—will be made available to eligible Native American, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian entities for broadband deployment as well as for digital inclusion, workforce development, telehealth, and distance learning.

Our bill also includes \$2.75 billion for the Digital Equity Act, which was introduced by Senators MURRAY, PORTMAN, and KING.

It establishes two NTIA-administered grant programs that would help communities that have not yet secured the skills, technologies, and support needed to take advantage of broadband connection.

In that regard, I would note an article that appeared this morning in Roll Call that is entitled "Industry groups, equity advocates applaud infrastructure bill's broadband provisions." I am proud of that. We worked very hard to make sure that there was widespread support for this legislation, particularly the broadband provisions.

We also included additional funding, \$1 billion, for the so-called middle mile. This would create a State grant program for the construction, improvement, and acquisition of middle mile infrastructure.

And I would note that eligible entities include telecommunications companies, technology companies, electric utilities, utility cooperatives, a wide range of businesses and organizations that could help us with that middle mile.

And that refers to the installation of a dedicated line that transmits a signal to and from the internet point of presence.

Competition of middle mile routes is necessary—completion of those middle mile routes is necessary to serve areas and reduce capital expenditures and lower operating costs.

So originally we had \$500 million for this; the final package has \$1 billion, at the request of certain Members from the Presiding Officer's side of the aisle.

So my point is that the broadband provisions in this bill are going to make such a difference. We are in an era where, I think most of us would agree, that access to high-speed internet is another way that we connect, just as roads and bridges are ways that we connect. We connect to family members; we connect to friends; we connect to our colleagues at work; we connect to healthcare providers; we connect to educators; and it is absolutely essential that we make this investment, and it is a generous investment, so that we can eliminate the disparities that were laid bare by the pandemic and bring high-speed internet to every section of our country.

The technologies may differ, the providers will certainly not be the same,

but this investment will make a real difference to so many Americans who today still lack access to high-speed internet.

I see the Republican leader has arrived on the floor.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it has been a little more than 6 months since the Biden administration and our Democratic-led Congress were sworn in. So let's zoom out from the daily political drama and ask the simplest possible question: How is it going? How is the leadership working out for middle-class families? Or put more directly: What big aspects of our national life could Democrats even claim are headed in the right direction on their watch?

In January, our Democratic friends inherited the most favorable trend lines that any incoming administration could possibly ask for. Three safe and effective vaccines had been discovered, developed, and were already spreading across our country. Our economy was packed with dry powder and ready for a historic comeback. It was already morning in America when this Democratic government showed up. Mostly what they had to do was not get in the way.

So where are we 6 months in? The U.S. economy has broken some recent records, mostly the wrong ones. Inflation just clocked its steepest 12-month increase in more than a decade. The month before, a separate measure of core inflation rose at its fastest rate since 1992—higher gas prices, higher grocery prices, soaring costs for everything from household purchases, to automobiles, to housing itself.

Inflation is painful enough, but it isn't the only problem. Employment growth has not been fast enough. Last quarter, GDP grew much more slowly than anticipated. Six months and trillions of dollars of government spending into the Democrats' efforts at a recovery, and Gallup says America's economic confidence is still only neutral. We are not—we are not—where we need to be.

What about the rule of law? There is still a historic surge in people trying to come across our southern border, but administration officials have spent far more energy denying responsibility for the problem than trying to fix it. Catch and release is still the name of the game.

According to news reports, out of tens of thousands of illegal immigrants who have simply been released into the interior of our country without a court date—now listen to this—just 13 percent—13 percent have shown up at their mandatory meeting with ICE afterward.

So the border is functionally open—especially absurd at a time when many leaders are asking American citizens to

step up various COVID precautions. Not much testing, social distancing, or mask wearing is happening in the Rio Grande Valley.

Meanwhile, a surge in violent crime, including recordbreaking murders in many places, has too many citizens afraid of their own city streets.

Perhaps our Democratic friends think foreign policy is going well. I sure wish it were. The President's rushed pullback from Afghanistan has left our friends and partners in the lurch and rolled out a red carpet for a Taliban takeover that is already underway. Its approach to Iran appears to be promising big concessions to our adversary for no reason even as their terrorist proxies continue to attack U.S., Israeli, and Arab interests all across the region.

While I appreciate the administration's tough talk on Russia and China, those words ring hollow when they fail to impose real consequences on cyber attacks and propose to cut our defense spending after inflation.

So what about COVID-19 itself? Certainly, the pandemic is not the fault of any administration or any political party, but this administration boasted with great confidence they had a playbook that was guaranteed to crush the virus. They have continued to roll out the vaccines the prior administration developed, and for that, they certainly deserve some credit. But, especially recently, Americans have received far too many mixed messages and muddled communications about masks, vaccines, and what risks remain and for whom.

Meanwhile, the Democrats' allies in the teachers unions continue to speculate publicly that perhaps schools may not remain open this fall after all. They are flirting with another lost year for our kids even when there are safe and effective vaccines that can reduce adults' risk of grave illness to almost nil and when we know that, mercifully, this virus has mostly spared children from serious illness the whole time.

So, look, everyone is rooting for America; everyone is rooting for the recovery that middle-class families deserve; but that is not what the Democrats' decisions and policies are delivering. No wonder America's optimism has been in free fall the last few months. One survey found that a majority—55 percent—are pessimistic about where the country is headed in the coming year. That pessimism has increased almost 20 percentage points since just this spring.

The soul of America has not been restored. It is anxious, it is uneasy, and in too many cases, the more the Democrats' policies have taken effect, the more problems American families have faced.

Now, certainly, the 6-month mark still provides plenty of time for my Democratic colleagues to recalibrate. We have already notched some bipartisan wins here in the Senate. Our col-

leagues could put away the partisan approach that has already supercharged inflation, slowed rehiring, and is setting back our national security. But, alas, our Democratic colleagues are signaling they are still addicted to going it alone.

My friends on the other side are signaling that a few days from now, just a few days from now, they will begin the process of ramming through a reckless, multitrillion-dollar taxing-and-spending spree that will stick middle-class families with higher costs, more inflation, fewer jobs, and lower wages.

It is not the strategy that will turn around Democrats' lackluster report card; it will do just the opposite. It almost seems designed to make every problem that families are facing considerably worse. It would meet significant inflation with another massive avalanche of printing and borrowing. It would hammer a tenuous economic recovery with historic tax hikes and job-killing Green New Deal regulations. It would, for some reason, respond to a live border crisis with a big amnesty to lure even more people here illegally.

No working American in Kentucky or anywhere else would look at a plan like this and get on board, and neither will a single Republican. If Washington Democrats really want to take the remarkable head start they inherited at the dawn of this recovery year and squander it through bad policy, they will need to do it all alone.

Ms. COLLINS. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

AWARDING FOUR CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDALS TO THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL POLICE AND THOSE WHO PROTECTED THE U.S. CAPITOL ON JANUARY 6, 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Well, Mr. President, as you know, as we all know, January 6 unleashed many horrors, but it also revealed many heroes. A day that many of us remember for its violence, anger, and destruction was not without its share of bravery, sacrifice, and selflessness.

I am, of course, talking about the Capitol Police and the Metropolitan Police. In a few moments, my colleagues Senators KLOBUCHAR and BLUNT will ask the Senate to award them the Congressional Gold Medal. It is the highest expression of gratitude that Congress can bestow. I cannot imagine more worthy recipients than the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend this temple of democracy.

I want to thank Senator KLOBUCHAR, the chair of the Rules Committee, and