EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Linda Thomas-Greenfield, of Louisiana, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, with the rank and status of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and the Representative of the United States of America in the Security Council of the United Nations.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, it has only been a month since President Biden took the oath of office and Democrats assumed the majority in the Senate, but we have already taken some major steps to repair and rebuild our country.

I said this Chamber would begin its work by accomplishing three immediate tasks: confirming President Biden's nominees, addressing the COVID pandemic with bold legislation, and conducting a fair and honest impeachment trial of Donald Trump. The Senate has made steady progress on all three.

A little over a week ago, we concluded the second impeachment trial of Donald Trump. The House managers presented a powerful, harrowing reconstruction of the former President's role in inciting an attack against our democracy—the greatest offense ever—ever—committed by a President of the United States. Despite the final verdict of this Chamber, Donald Trump deserves to be convicted, and I believe he will be convicted in the court of public opinion. History will judge Mr. Trump harshly, deservedly so, and everyone who condoned the dangerous final acts of his Presidency will live with that in history as well and live rather dishonorably.

Even during the impeachment trial, the Senate advanced the ball on the two other priorities I mentioned. Our committees conducted several confirmation hearings and worked closely with their House colleagues to draft COVID relief legislation. That process is ongoing among Senate Members, as well as over in the House. Now that the trial is complete, we are going to move forward on both fronts.

Democrats remain hard at work preparing the desperately needed COVID relief bill, which is on track to go to the President's desk before the March 14 expiration of unemployment insurance benefits, and starting this evening, the Senate will continue the process of confirming President Biden's nominees with a vote on Linda Thomas-Greenfield to serve as the next U.N. Ambassador.

Ms. Thomas-Greenfield has spent three decades in the U.S. Foreign Service. She is exceptionally qualified, and that was reflected in the bipartisan support she received from the Foreign Relations Committee. If confirmed, she will assume the role of U.N. Ambassador at a time when the nations of the world must deepen their cooperation on the fight against COVID–19 and the fight against climate change, among other critical priorities. She will have no time to waste in rebuilding America's reputation and reasserting the first instrument of American power—diplomacy. I look forward to voting in favor of her nomination.

After that, the Senate will immediately proceed to the nomination of Tom Vilsack to serve as the Secretary of Agriculture. Mr. Vilsack is no stranger to the Senate confirmation process or to the Department of Agriculture in having served as its Secretary under President Obama. The former Governor of Iowa has made a career out of caring for and supporting our Nation's farmers. Mr. Vilsack was approved by the Agriculture Committee by a unanimous vote. I expect he will receive the same bipartisan reception by the full Senate.

For the rest of the week, we will continue to confirm Members of the President's Cabinet: first, Jennifer Granholm to serve as the Secretary of Energy; second, Dr. Miguel Cardona to serve as the Secretary of Education. Both nominees have been advanced by the respective committees with bipartisan votes—a pattern this week.

At a time when our Nation is gripped by a once-in-a-century crisis, the President deserves to have his nominees approved quickly by this Chamber so they can immediately get to work healing our great country.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on another matter entirely, today, the United States will surpass more than 500,000 deaths from COVID–19—a half a million souls.

How as a nation do we grapple with this enormous tragedy? How do we even comprehend a number that big or a loss that great? Do we imagine five of our largest football stadiums, filled to the max, wiped out in an instant? The city of Atlanta or Sacramento erased overnight? A 9/11 attack every single day for 169 days in a row?

They say a single death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. We must not let this tragic milestone wash over us like just another awful statistic stacked on top of a year's worth of awful statistics. Instead, we must treat this moment as 500,000 individual tragedies: the empty chair at the dinner table; the empty half of the bed at night that people are suffering through; the unplayed pianos and uncelebrated birthdays and funerals that were never held; the neighbors and colleagues and friends and family who died without a chance for their loved ones to hold their hands; the grandchildren, wrapped in protective gear, waving goodbye to grandparents from across the silence of a hospital room—500,000 American souls and counting.

There is no way—no way—to properly account for the loss of so many lives in so short a time, but I would ask my fellow Americans to mark this terrible day by doing two simple things.

First, keep in your hearts the families who have lost a loved one. Reach out to that colleague or friend, and offer sympathy and support. Stop for a moment and grieve for your fellow citizens or for someone you have lost personally. We all know someone who is gone. I learned of another one yesterday.

And, second, let us strive to end this pandemic as swiftly as possible. For us in the Congress, that means moving forward with legislation to speed vaccine distribution and help the American people during this time of economic crisis, which is what the American Rescue Plan is all about, but every American can contribute by continuing to follow the guidelines and staying safe, by not losing hope or patience as we round the final corner.

We will—we will—get through this, but, today, let us mourn the 500,000 Americans we have lost and commit ourselves to a future when the days of these tragic milestones are finally and firmly behind us.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 9.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Jennifer Mulhern Granholm, of Michigan, to be Secretary of Energy.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill clerk read as follows: