here, and this is a good nomination. I hope my colleagues will support it.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, having said that, let me remind my colleagues that we are still in the middle of a global pandemic—if we need to be reminded. I don't think we do. But once we have voted on the nomination before us today, I would urge the Senate to pivot and begin focusing next on examining issues related to the pandemic and to ensuring that the assistance we provided in the legislation we have passed so far—four pieces, some bigger than others—is getting to the families and the communities that badly need it. If we were unable or unwilling to do so, I am not sure that the Senate should be returning to Washington to act on nonurgent business in contravention of the recommendation of the Office of the Attending Physician and while this entire region is still under stay-at-home orders.

I also want to make it clear that the Environment and Public Works Committee, on which I serve and lead with Senator JOHN BARRASSO of Wyoming, was willing to approve this particular nomination unanimously by voice vote, but it is what is it is, and we are here today.

In the midst of a global pandemic, the majority leader says he is concerned with nominations. Well, then, let's address positions that are actually more relevant to the crisis that we face today.

Currently, one-third of the inspector general positions that are confirmed by the Senate remain either vacant or without permanent leadership. The President has nominated individuals to fill some, but not all, of these positions. The Senate should work quickly to vet those nominees we have received, especially those who would be involved with oversight for the coronavirus response.

My colleagues will recall that this past March Congress passed an unprecedented $2 trillion relief package, the CARES Act, to bring help to millions of Americans who find themselves in dire straits through no fault of their own. Thankfully, the CARES Act created three new separate oversight bodies to monitor this emergency funding. I was also proud to work with Democrats and Republican colleagues alike to help secure an additional $20 million to ensure that the Government Accountability Office, which is known as GAO, can conduct important oversight of this funding. In fact, I learned last week that GAO has already notified Congress that it has already either undertaken or begun investigations or has planned investigations of over 150 audits that are related to this funding. Now, I appreciate GAO's diligence on this important matter; not only do I appreciate it, but we appreciate it, and the American taxpayers appreciate it as well.

More than ever, it is critical that we have robust oversight to make sure that this money gets into the pockets of those who need it most and not into the pockets of those who would literally steal money from the needy and steal money from the taxpayers of this country.

If our majority leader wants to bring the Senate back, then I would like to suggest that our time would be well spent making sure that those oversight bodies created in the CARES Act are fully functional, including the CARES Act Congressional Oversight Commission, which I am told still lacks a chairperson. This is a five-person panel. It is one created by each of our leaders in the House and the Senate. That would give us four, and then another one would be jointly agreed to by the majority leader here and the Speaker of the House. I am told that as of today, as of this moment, we still lack a chairperson of that important panel. I hope that our leader here, Leader MCCONNELL, and Speaker PELOSI will work with haste even today—even today—to jointly name a chair to the Congressional Oversight Commission as required by law.

The CARES Act also created the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee. That is a committee composed of inspectors general from relevant agencies to oversee all spending appropriated through the CARES Act. That is a huge undertaking. Unfortunately, those IG positions at key agencies, including the Treasury Department and including the Department of Education, still remain vacant.

We have seen over the last month just how crucial it is that our IGs remain independent. Since the Senate was last in session, the President has unceremoniously removed, reassigned, or undermined highly regarded inspectors general who apparently weren't loyal enough to him or who dared to criticize what they viewed as a failed or flawed response to the coronavirus. For example, at the beginning of April, President Trump removed Glenn Fine, a highly regarded acting inspector general for the Pentagon, who had only a week earlier been selected by his peers—selected by his peers—to chair the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, the third oversight body created by the CARES Act.

We have also seen the President look to replace the Health and Human Services IG who, in a detailed report, pointed out the severe shortages that a number of our hospitals have been facing during the coronavirus outbreak.

I believe it is clear that Congress needs to speak up when appropriate and do a better job supporting our inspectors general when this President—or frankly any President—takes retaliatory action against the independent watchdogs responsible for identifying failures, waste, fraud, and abuse across our Federal Government, especially when this much money is at risk.

If the Senate is going to be back in session, it would seem to me these critical oversight positions should be among our top priorities.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT J. FEITEL

Mr. President, having said that, let me turn again to the nomination before the Senate today. Like all agencies, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission needs a strong and independent inspector general, and I believe in Mr. Feitel we have one. I believe he is up to the task.

We cannot be complacent when it comes to nuclear safety. Just remember, 50 percent of the carbon-free energy produced in this country is produced by our nuclear powerplants. Think about that. In a day and age when the climate crisis is a huge threat literally to our planet and those of us who live on it, right now, half of the carbon-free electricity comes in this country from nuclear powerplants.

It is the job of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to oversee those plants and make sure they are being run well, run safely, and in ways that enable us to continue to depend on them as we go forward for carbon-free electricity.

Anyway, Mr. Feitel is well qualified and prepared, I think; certainly the Environment and Public Works Committee believes he is prepared to take on this responsibility. I hope my colleagues will join Senator BARRASSO, our chairman, and myself and the members of our committee to vote yes on this nomination.

With that, I don't see anybody waiting to speak after me, so I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING JIM CUMMINGS

Mr. BRAUN. Mr. President, I rise to honor and recognize the life and contributions of Mr. Jim Cummings to the countless Hoosiers whose lives he touched over nine decades.

Jim was a giant in Indiana. His long and rich life left many indelible marks on our State. We look to people like Jim Cummings as an example of a life well lived in service to others. His role in founding the Indiana Black Expo in 1970 made him a leader to all Hoosiers during a time of great change in our State and our Nation. As a lifelong servant to those in his State and community, his dedication to conservative principles guided his thoughts and actions for many years.

His life of service extended beyond his work with the Indiana Black Expo. It included serving his community in public office on a number of boards in Indianapolis and working as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Department of Housing and Urban Development under President Ronald Reagan.

Indiana has lost one of its most distinguished Hoosiers of this generation.