That pace must continue this week with the confirmation of the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Transportation. After that, we need a Health and Human Services Secretary installed to oversee the public health response to COVID; an Education Secretary to facilitate the safe reopening of the schools, guided by the science; and a Secretary of HUD to help America's struggling families stay in their homes during this horrible economic crisis. The Senate is working at an encouraging pace, and we will not let up.

ORGANIZING RESOLUTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on the organizing resolution, well, since the last time I addressed this Chamber, there has been notable progress in my discussions with the Republican leader about organizing the Senate. Last night, the Republican leader dropped his demand for additional provisions on the organizing resolution and will agree to the 2001 rules that last governed the 50–50 Senate—exactly what Democrats proposed from the start.

I am glad the Republican leader finally relented, and we can move forward now to organize the Senate, Senate committees, chairs, and ranking members, and the process for moving bills and nominees to the floor from committees with an evenly divided number of Members. I am glad we are finally able to get the Senate up and running. My only regret is that it took so long because we have a great deal we need to accomplish over the next several weeks and months.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on COVID, in addition to the confirmation of critical Cabinet nominees, the Senate will soon move forward with legislation to address the twin crises facing our country: the public health crisis and the economic crisis.

In December, Congress took the important step of passing interim emergency relief to the country, but we left the job unfinished. I understand that recent opposition from the political right for more spending has increased in volume now that there is a Democrat in the White House, but the pandemic doesn't particularly care that there has been a change in the administration. The needs of our country are still great, and the urgency to act is clearer than ever.

The Congressional Budget Office told us last fall that the COVID–19 pandemic has taken more than $17 trillion out of our economy—$17 trillion. No doubt, Congress has passed substantial relief, but looking at the data, we are nowhere close to filling the COVID-sized hole in our economy. Expanded unemployment insurance will once again expire in March. State and local governments, which have already cut over a million jobs, are still reeling from budget deficits and have not received direct assistance. The amount of direct payments to the American people in the previous bill was regrettably much lower than many of us, including myself, wanted. We must continue supporting the rapid and massive distribution of the vaccine to finally crush this virus once and for all.

So the Senate is going to press forward on another COVID-relief bill. We want to work with our Republican colleagues to advance this legislation in a bipartisan way, and the work must move forward—preferably, with our Republican colleagues, but without them if we must.

We are still in the midst of a once-in-a-century crisis that has reshaped our economy and altered nearly every aspect of American life. Americans are still getting sick. Americans are still dying. Americans are still losing their jobs. We must not suffer timidity or delay. There is great urgency to continue the work of COVID relief, and that is exactly what the Senate will do.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

FILIBUSTER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, two Democratic Senators confirmed they will not provide the votes to eliminate the legislative filibuster. The senior Senator from West Virginia issued a public ''guarantee'': ''I do not support doing away with the filibuster under any condition.''

Any chance of changing his mind? ''None whatsoever.''

The senior Senator from Arizona made the same commitment. She opposes ending the legislative filibuster and ''is not open''—not open—''to changing her mind.'' Our colleague informed me directly last night that under no circumstances would she reverse course.

Now, it should not be news that a few Members of the majority pledge they won't tear up a central rule, but the Democratic leader was reluctant to repeat the step I took as majority leader in unified government when I ruled out that step on principle.

Rather than relying on the Democratic leader, I took the discussion directly to his Members. Basic arithmetic now ensures that there are not enough votes to break the rule. This victory will let us move forward with the 50–50 power-sharing agreement containing all the elements of the 2001 model because it will sit on the very same foundation.

I want to discuss the precipice from which the Senate has stepped back. In 2013, Senator Harry Reid began the ''nuclear'' exchange over nominations. I said Democrats would regret it. A few years later, we have many Federal judges, including three Supreme Court Justices, who were confirmed with fewer than 60 votes.

The back-and-forth exchange over nominations had one institutional silver lining, because, routinely, filibustering nominations was itself a modern invention pioneered by Senate Democrats in the 2000s. So, on nominations, for all the fighting, the Senate just simply circled back to the simple majority threshold that had been our longstanding norm on nominations; that is, on the Executive Calendar.

Legislation is very different. When it comes to lawmaking, the Framers' vision and our history are abundantly clear. The Senate exists to require deliberation and cooperation. James Madison said the Senate's job was to provide a ''complicated check''—a ''complicated check,'' he said—against ''improper acts of legislation.'' We ensure that laws earn enough buy-in to receive the lasting consent of the governed. We stop bad ideas, improve good ideas, and keep laws from swinging wildly with every election.

Our friend, Lamar Alexander, put it this way in his farewell speech. He said: ''The Senate exists to produce broad agreements on controversial issues that become laws most of us have voted for and that a diverse country will accept.''

More than any other feature, it is the Senate's 60-vote threshold to end debate on legislation that achieves this. It ensures narrow interests cannot ignore the rest of the country. It embodies Jefferson's maxim that ''great innovations should not be forced on slender majorities.''

The bar for lawmaking is high. It should be high, even if both bodies take turns at being slightly frustrated by it. If your legislation can't pass the Senate, you don't scrap the rules or lower the standards. You improve your idea, take your case to the people, or both.

Four years ago, Republicans had just won unified control. President Trump and others pressured us heavily—me, in particular—to scrap this rule when it was protecting the Democratic minority. But we stood firm. I stood firm and endured many tweets on the subject. I said we would not do that to our colleagues in the minority.

No short-term policy win justifies destroying the Senate as we know it, especially since laws would become so brittle and reversible. So Democratic Senators used the 60-vote threshold to shape and block legislation. They stalled COVID relief, they blocked police reform, and they stopped even modest measures to protect innocent life because I chose not to destroy the tool that allowed them to do that.

That same tool that some Democrats now want to destroy, they used freely and liberally throughout their years in the minority, and I protected their ability to do that. Republicans understand you don't destroy the Senate for a fleeting advantage. Our friends across the aisle must see the same.