I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Mr. COONS. Madam President, it has long been said that ''neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays'' our U.S. postal ''couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.'' These words, in fact, are chiseled in granite above the entrance to the post office on 8th Avenue in New York City—one of the grandest post offices in our Nation. It is the adopted creed of the faithful and hard-working letter carriers and frontline workforce of our Postal Service.

As I have said before, I have no beef with the men and women of our Postal Service, but I have real and deep concerns about how the Postal Service is being run under the current Postmaster General.

President Biden doesn't get to choose a new Postmaster General just because he is the new President. In fact, the current officeholder, Louis DeJoy, was chosen by the Board under the previous administration.

Weeks ago, I joined with many colleagues and with Chairman PETERS of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, which is responsible for the Postal Service, to send a letter to Postmaster General DeJoy to restore on-time delivery and stop the harmful systemwide changes that have caused unacceptable mail delays.

Sadly, that is not the first time I have had to reach out, with Senators in this body, to the Postmaster General. In fact, on five separate occasions, we have written the Postmaster General, between August and February, last year to this year. We have demanded transparency. We have insisted on the restoration of mail sorting machines. We have asked for assistance with vote-by-mail deliveries and wrote for just simple answers to pending constituent inquiries.

In my hometown of Wilmington, DE, last August, I joined our attorney general, Kathy Jennings, my senior Senator, TOM CARPER, Congresswoman LISA BLUNT ROCHESTER, and a series of union leaders for a day of action to save the Postal Service.

A few days later, I drove myself to our mail distribution center in New Castle after leadership of the Postal Service denied my request to visit. Thanks to having been alerted by some frontline employees, I drove around back and was able to see a dismantled massive piece of mail handling equipment left outside in the rain.

In January and February alone, my office received hundreds of messages from constituents complaining about mail issues. Since last April, I have heard from nearly 5,000 Delawareans—folks asking for robust funding for the Postal Service, wanting stronger vote-by-mail initiatives, and hundreds and hundreds of them reporting delays in the mail.

I want to take a few minutes, if I might, and just go through some of these concerns I have heard, which, I have also heard from colleagues, are being replicated across our Nation.

Gloria Lester, down in Lewes, in Sussex County, said that mail that previously took just 3 to 4 days is now taking her 4 to 6 weeks. Her bills are due before she even gets the statements. And her husband's VA medication took a month to arrive from the date they mailed it.

Jim Nichols of Milford wrote concerned about the delay in getting his newspapers, his magazines, and his other periodicals.

And Jim is not alone. I have heard from local and regional newspapers that rely on the Postal Service to deliver out-of-State and out-of-area subscribers.

We have a beach area with a lot of homeowners who live here in our Nation's Capital or elsewhere throughout the region. And Chris Raush, who is with the Cape Gazette, which gets mailed to folks all over our region, told me some of their out-of-State subscribers don't receive the paper for a month, and then, when they do, they get a big bundle of old papers. And now with papers not showing up weeks at a time, they have had to tell subscribers this is just out of their control and offer refunds.

Megan Stibbe, of the Delmarva Farmer, another local paper, said that she has ''been having a lot of trouble with Delaware deliveries. The postal system,'' as she said in writing to me, ''is very screwed up right now. Delmarva Farmers have not received their newspapers at all in January.''

I have received dozens and dozens more emails, texts, letters, and phone messages from frustrated constituents.

Dianne Boyle, of Magnolia, DE, felt so strongly about this ongoing debacle of delayed delivery in the Postal Service that she hand delivered her own letter of concern to my Dover office.

Richard Bilkski of Selbyville, a gentleman with real and significant heart issues that require him to be on medication, was down to his very last pill on January 25. After calling and calling and calling, it turned out that his medication had been sitting in the Wilmington post office for 3 weeks.

Toby Rubenstein, from Hockessin, wrote me and said:

> I have paid my bills by check all my life. [And now] the Postal Service is so unreliable, that I now have monthly problems paying [my] bills on time. [And] I'm not alone in this.

Claudette Richardson of Newark, DE, wrote me a note saying that she had mailed her sister a Christmas card on December 14, and it arrived February 12.

Marcy Leib Rolmann wrote me and said: Our ''mail here in Sussex County as everywhere is horrible, despite our great letter carriers.''

Geiana Hollis of Wilmington wrote to me last month because of her passport sitting idle at a Philadelphia distribution center for 10 days. She was set to travel abroad and had to delay her trip.

Bill Powers, former county councilman I know well from New Castle County, a member of the Farm Bureau, is a longtime turkey grower who now provides fresh eggs for local farmers markets. Bill has experienced significant losses with turkey and chick deliveries and called my office with concerns.

And I want, before I close, to mention one last story, from Trebs Thompson, of Newark, an egg farmer with Whimsical Farms. Trebs wrote:

> Largely our postal system has been a jewel. It handles a large volume of mail cheaply, with a high degree of speed and accuracy. Many of us depend on it for government paperwork, medications, orders, payments, and for farmers like me, seeds [and] day-old chicks.
>
> The Post Office has been shipping day-old chicks to farms like mine for over 100 years. Today, all 20 baby hens arrived cold and lifeless. I cried [as I opened the box]. The [postal] supervisor cried. The gentleman who normally delivers my mail apologized profusely, but [it is] not his fault.
>
> Whatever one feels about mail-in ballots or politics, I am asking you to put this aside and do what you can to restore the Postal Service.

Trebs Thompson is right. No farmer should ever have to open a box of dead chicks. No constituent should have to hand deliver a letter to their Senator. Our veterans shouldn't be going without lifesaving medication.

Postmaster DeJoy appeared before Members of the House last week and apologized for the slow mail delivery and said he has a forthcoming plan, which I am concerned includes further cuts to delivery service.

So let me summarize. My understanding is that DeJoy's plans for the future of the Postal Service include higher prices and slower delivery. Delawareans are tired, and our Postal Service workers are tired, too, of the constraints placed on them. How will we solve this problem? In my view, we need to confirm as quickly as possible President Biden's nominees to the Postal Board of Governors: Ron Stroman, Amber McReynolds, and Anton Hajjar—all folks who have deep experience in the postal system. They could get us back on track.

We also have to prioritize investments in the Postal Service. Congress secured $10 billion for the Postal Service in the unanimously passed CARES Act to provide the resources to maintain operation at a time when families are relying on mail service more than ever during this pandemic.

I will continue to support the Postal Service. I will continue to petition the Postmaster General, and I won't stop until there is a solution to this critical and pressing issue. Our letter carriers

and our customers shouldn't suffer because of toxic leadership at the highest levels of our Postal Service.

I yield the floor to my colleague from the State of Maine.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

AUTO FOR VETERANS ACT

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, last week, I was pleased to join my colleague from West Virginia, Senator JOE MANCHIN, in introducing the Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans Act, better known as the AUTO for Veterans Act. I am pleased that Senators BOOZMAN, HASSAN, and BLUNT have joined as original cosponsors.

Our bill would lessen the financial burden on severely disabled veterans who require special adaptive equipment to drive a motor vehicle. It would do so by increasing access to the Department of Veterans Affairs automobile grant program.

The VA currently provides eligible veterans with a one-time grant of approximately $21,400 to be used to purchase a new or used automobile and necessary adaptive equipment, such as specialized pedals and switches. This grant is often used in conjunction with the VA's special adaptive equipment grants, which help our veterans purchase additional adaptive equipment, such as powered lifts, for example, for an existing automobile to make it safe and feasible for a veteran with disabilities.

Although veterans can receive multiple special adaptive equipment grants over the course of their lives, for some reason they are limited to just a single automobile grant. The current limitation fails to take into account that a veteran is likely to need more than one vehicle in his or her lifetime. In fact, the Department of Transportation reports that, in 2019, the average age of a household vehicle was 11.8 years, and a vehicle that has been modified structurally tends to have a shorter useful life.

According to the VA independent budget prepared by Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and the VFW, the substantial costs of modified vehicles, coupled with inflation, present a financial hardship for many disabled veterans who need to replace their primary mode of transportation once their car or van or truck reaches its lifespan. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that a new vehicle modified with adaptive equipment will cost anywhere from $20,000 to $80,000. These are significant costs for a veteran with disabilities to incur to replace his or her primary mode of transportation. That is why veterans should be eligible to receive a vehicle grant every 10 years and our legislation, the Collins-Manchin bill, would do just that.

A Maine veteran whom I know well, Neal Williams of Shirley, ME, used a VA automobile grant in 1999 to purchase an adaptive vehicle, a Ford Econoline van. He has also had to purchase several adaptive vehicles since 1999, with each one lasting over 250,000 miles until they simply were no longer roadworthy. His current vehicle now has over 100,000 miles, and soon he will need a new one. He told me that purchasing a new van will cost him well over $50,000, which is more than he paid for his home in rural Maine. This is an enormous burden on our disabled veterans who need to purchase expensive adaptive vehicles in order to drive safely or to drive at all.

Madam President, I feel like I am preaching to the choir here. Our Nation owes our veterans such an enormous debt. It is a debt that truly can never be fully repaid. Let's honor our commitment to our veterans by continuing to support their needs, including the needs of veterans who are disabled and need this adaptive technology for their vehicles long after they have been discharged or retire from Active Duty.

This is a simple bill, but it is a bill that would make such a difference for so many of our disabled veterans who need vehicles with adaptive equipment so that they can drive themselves and drive safely. The AUTO for Veterans Act is an important step that we can take to meet this need and help those who have made so many sacrifices to serve our Nation.

I urge all of my colleagues to join us in helping our Nation's veterans by supporting this bill.

Thank you.

NOMINATION OF MIGUEL A. CARDONA

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, after 4 years of Secretary DeVos' efforts to promote greater privatization of our education system and dismantle the civil rights of students, Miguel Cardona is the person we need to restore the promise of America's schools. A former public school teacher who went on to be a leader in the same district where he was once an English learner, Dr. Cardona has demonstrated a lifelong commitment to our public schools and the belief that all children are entitled to a quality education in a safe and nurturing learning environment. He also has a proven track record of effectively responding to the pandemic, helping students overcome the digital divide, and safely reopening schools as the Connecticut Education Commissioner.

The pandemic has upended our education system, disrupting learning and exacerbating inequities. From day one as Secretary of the Department of Education, Dr. Cardona will need to be prepared to meet the challenges facing our students and educators, from addressing learning loss and social, emotional, and mental health to reversing declining higher education enrollment rates and a sky-rocketing affordability crisis. Additionally, as deep disparities continue to shortchange low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities, Dr. Cardona will be a key partner in working toward closing these funding and educational opportunity gaps.

I am proud to support Dr. Cardona's nomination, and I look forward to working together to at last make good on our promises to fully fund title I and IDEA, to expand access to quality early childhood education and community schools, and to ensure higher education is accessible for everyone.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I rise today to voice my strong support for Dr. Cardona's nomination to serve as Secretary of Education.

Across the country, students, parents, and educators are in crisis. Every day without an experienced leader at the Department of Education is a day that we are losing precious ground. Back in my home State of Washington, I heard from a mother in Yakima whose children shared one iPhone to learn. I heard from a father of a high school freshman in Spokane, worried about the social and psychological toll the pandemic is taking on his son. I heard from students at the Lummi Nation, trying to focus on remote classes while in multigenerational households on a shared, spotty broadband.

I know there are so many similar stories from people in my State and across the country about how this pandemic is making life harder, the ways it has set back students from where they would be in a typical year, denied them access to critical school resources, deepened longstanding inequities, and so much more.

From early education to higher education, we need to make sure students and their families have the support they need to not only get a high-quality education but to make sure every student can try.

Democrats want to get students safely back in the classrooms for in-person learning as soon as possible. So I am glad the Biden administration put forward clear, science-based, public health guidance schools have long needed. There is no one solution that will ensure safety on its own as our country ramps up vaccine distribution.

Congress has to do its part and pass the American Rescue Plan to provide vital funding for schools—to secure adequate PPE, to reduce class sizes to increase social distancing, to improve ventilation and contract tracing, and to take all the steps they need to do so that they can safely reopen for in-person learning or provide high-quality distance learning if it is not safe in their community to return to the classroom and so that they can assess and address the damage this pandemic has done, especially the way it has deepened inequities that have hurt students of color, students of families with low incomes, students with disabilities, LGBTQ students, women, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and so much more.

At this moment of crisis, Dr. Cardona is exactly the leader we need at the Department of Education to tackle these challenges. During his confirmation