MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, last year, Congress rallied five times around historic bipartisan legislation to meet urgent and unprecedented needs. Our COVID–19 packages reinforced the healthcare frontlines, fueled the sprint for vaccines, and cast lifelines for the workers and small businesses hit hardest by shutdowns.

Together, those bills cost about $4 trillion, but none of those measures passed the House of Representatives with less than a bipartisan supermajority of about 80 percent—completely overwhelming support.

Then, last week, House Democrats rammed through the American Rescue Plan Act on a razor-thin margin of 50.7 percent. The only thing bipartisan about their bill was the opposition to it. Their bill costs about $2 trillion. That is roughly the same size as the entire CARES Act that saved our health system and economy through months of shutdowns last year. Even liberal experts admit this is far out of proportion to what is needed now, with vaccines going into arms and the economy already primed to literally roar back.

Amazingly, Democrats managed to allocate less than 9 percent—9 percent—of their massive bill to the entire healthcare response; 9 percent of the $1.9 trillion related to the healthcare response, and—listen to this—even less than 1 percent of the $1.9 trillion to the vaccines that will actually finish the fight.

They needed to save the other 91 percent of the borrowed money for a vast catalog of liberal spending with basically no relationship whatsoever to beating COVID–19. For example, they want to send wheelbarrows of cash to State and local bureaucrats to bail out mismanagement from before the pandemic. They are changing the previous bipartisan funding formula in ways that will especially bias the money toward big blue States. This outraged a bipartisan group of Governors, largely from middle America, who went on record this week. There are generous new benefit packages for government employees. There are provisions to let abortion providers drain money from rescue programs that were built to save Main Street small businesses. There is a strange new Acela corridor kickback where they will make Medicare send more money to just New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Delaware.

Just looking at the timeframe for all of their spending belies any notion that this is an urgent rescue plan.

Take the K–12 funding which, contrary to science, Democrats say is a prerequisite for opening schools. Ninety-five percent of that supposedly urgent money would not be spent this fiscal year but, instead, over the next 7 years. Let me say that again. Ninety-five percent of the money for K–12 is not going to be spent this year, but over the next 7 years. That is not my definition of an emergency.

Grants for rural healthcare would be on a slow drip out through fiscal 2024. Agriculture-related funds would trickle out over the next—listen to this—over the next decade. It doesn't sound very urgent to me.

What the American people need are fast-acting plans to get schools reopened now, get laid-off workers back into jobs, and finish the fight against this virus right now. The Democrats have, instead, drawn up a liberal omnibus to fund miscellaneous government spending over the next decade.

We are adding all this money to the national debt, and they have a rescue package with most of the money being spent out far in the future. That is why there was bipartisan opposition over in the House. That is why aspects of the House bill are already dropping like flies before this thing even hits the Senate floor.

A pet project for the San Francisco Bay area is gone. Special upgrades for a bridge connecting New York to Canada, gone. Even CNN had to admit these were ''controversial.'' Senator SANDERS' far-left minimum wage policy that would have killed 1.4 million jobs just as we try to recover appears to be gone, too—at least for now.

According to public reports, right now, as we speak, several of our Democratic colleagues are frantically trying to trim back other crazy provisions: the runaway government bailouts, the policies that will keep workers at home when we should be focusing on rehiring.

Just a few days ago, President Biden's Chief of Staff bragged that this smorgasbord of borrowed money will add up to ''the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation.''

So that is what you get when the Democratic leader persuades all of my distinguished friends across the aisle that their first undertaking as Senate committee chairmen should be to outsource all their gavels to the House.

The Senate wrote the CARES Act. In the earliest days of the crisis, this Chamber took the bull by the horns. I personally assembled bipartisan task forces that crafted urgent solutions to help America weather the storm.

This time around, on the substance, the Senate has been largely missing in action. House Democrats are bristling and publicly pushing back if our Senate Democratic colleagues even try to make their mark on this partisan bill in small ways.

So these two radically different processes have generated two radically different pieces of legislation.

The Democrats had a choice. They chose to go it alone, tack to the left, leave families' top priorities on the cutting-room floor.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on a completely different matter, just 6 weeks into unified Democratic government, we already have another crisis brewing on our southern border. In January, Customs and Border Protection logged more than 78,000 encounters on our southwest border, more than double the figure from January of 2020.

Last week, HHS sources told reporters we just logged the busiest February in the history of the Unaccompanied Alien Children Program. The number of kids turning up on our border with no parents is soaring, and everyone expects the numbers to keep climbing.

Now the Biden administration is reportedly planning to reopen the same kinds of emergency shelters over which Democrats vilified the Trump administration a couple of years back. Both President Biden and his Secretary of Homeland Security have said this week they don't think this is a crisis. Not a crisis, they say? Well, if this isn't a crisis, with unaccompanied kids pouring in and exceeding the capacity in a pandemic, I would hate to see what one looks like.

The cause of this emergency is not some mystery. It is not mysterious at all. Everybody knows exactly what happened. The new administration explicitly campaigned on weakening border security, and 6 weeks in, they have reversed the ''Remain in Mexico'' policy, begun letting more people in in a haphazard way, and broadcast confusing mixed messages.

The L.A. Times says: ''Biden immigration policy stirs confusion at Mexico border.'' They interviewed one woman who crossed the Rio Grande ''on a smuggler's raft'' and was only briefly detained before being released into our country. She explained she had specifically come because of the new Biden administration: ''That gave us the opportunity to come.''

Another reporter put it this way: ''The message received in Tijuana and other Mexican border cities was