on the utilities. Folks are facing eviction. American families have had their water shut off, their heat shut off in the depth of winter, and the power cut during their kids' first days of virtual kindergarten.

Even as the vaccine is quickly making its way into Americans' arms now that President Biden has taken the helm, tens of thousands of Americans continue to get sick every week, and we are racing against the clock to defeat the pandemic and to save American lives.

Now, Congress has come together on several occasions to pass emergency relief in this time of extraordinary crisis. In each case, we saw our economy recover, briefly, before worrying trends took hold again, showing the depth of the economic crisis. It is not going to be quick and easy to get out of.

After the CARES bill passed, our economy stabilized before dipping deeply again in the summer. After we passed another emergency bill in December, the January numbers looked positive before once again slipping in recent weeks. Trusted economists—Treasury Secretary Yellen and Federal Chair Powell, both cautious, careful people—are telling us, plain as day, that the economy is not yet ready to stand on its own; that our recovery is deeply uncertain; that the risk of doing little is far greater than doing too much.

We have also arrived at this moment, about to take up the American Rescue Plan, because we remember what happened the last time our country faced a significant economic downturn. Congress was too limited and constrained in its response to the financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, and, as a result, the country suffered a long, slow, painful recovery—a lost decade for many American families, creating anger, pessimism, a sourness in the land that discombobulated our politics.

We are not going to make those same mistakes again. We are not going to condemn millions of working Americans to another lost decade of tepid recovery. We are not going to abdicate our responsibility to help the American people just because we have started to see the first hint that things aren't as bad as during the very worst days of the pandemic.

Our mission—our mission—is to crush the virus now, get our country back to normal, lay the foundation for our economy to come roaring back—roaring back.

That is what the American Rescue Plan is designed to do, and the entire country has gotten behind it. Hundreds of the Nation's top business leaders support the plan. More than 400 mayors and local leaders from both parties—Democrat and Republican—support the plan. The American people support the plan, including a clear majority of Democrats, Independents, Republicans.

It seems the only group that opposes the bill are Republicans here in Washington, and it is confounding. When Donald Trump was President, they were willing to vote for a total of over $3 trillion in aid. Now that President Biden is President and the economy is in the same pickle, generally speaking, they don't want to vote for a nickel. I wonder why. I wonder why.

And I have to say, a few of my Republican colleagues are going to some pretty ridiculous lengths to showcase their opposition to a bill The Economist has called ''one of the most popular bills in decades,'' a bill supported by a majority—a majority—of Republican voters, not Republican Senators, but voters.

Yesterday, the Republican Senator from Wisconsin—the same Senator who last summer proudly declared he would oppose even a dime more in COVID relief, the same Senator who spent a Senate hearing on Capitol security reading conspiracy theories into the RECORD and saying that January 6 wasn't an armed insurrection—decided to make himself the face of the Republican opposition to the bill by vowing to force the reading of the Senate amendment to the American Rescue Plan, in full, before we can proceed with the bill.

We all know this will merely delay the inevitable. It will accomplish little more than a few sore throats for the Senate clerks who work very hard, day in and day out, to help the Senate function. And I want to thank our clerks profoundly for the work they do every day, including the arduous task ahead of them.

Still, we are delighted that the Senator from Wisconsin wants to give the American people another opportunity to hear what is in the American Rescue Plan. We Democrats want America to hear what is in the plan. And if the Senator from Wisconsin wants the clerks to read it, let everybody listen because it has overwhelming support. We want them to hear about the direct checks they will get, as promised, to help them keep up with the cost of groceries, medicine, and the rent; about funding to expand testing and support the vaccine; about the resources for schools to reopen quickly and as safely as possible; about the money to keep firefighters, teachers, busdrivers, and first responders on the job; about the dollars to provide rental assistance to keep Americans in their homes; about the help for the hardest hit small businesses to hang on until brighter days return.

Oh, yes, when the clerks read, the American people will get another chance to hear about the tax breaks for low-income workers and assistance for American families struggling with childcare—two measures that help make the American Rescue Plan one of the single largest anti-poverty bills in recent history.

And then, once the American people have heard all over again about the provisions that make this bill so popular, about the support that is going to lift the country out of the crisis, provide millions of vaccines in people's arms, and set it on a path to strong recovery, the Senate is going to move forward with the bill.

No matter how long it takes, the Senate is going to stay in session to finish the bill this week. The American people deserve nothing less.

I yield the floor.

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. 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.

KENTUCKY FLOODING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, earlier this week, I described the terrible flooding across my home State of Kentucky. Rivers reached historic levels. Whole communities are still underwater.

Yesterday, my staff and I spoke with leaders in some of our hardest hit counties. The Estill County judge executive told me that he personally joined crews to help families escape danger. Small business owners in Lee County, who survived one COVID obstacle after another, now saw their life's work literally washed away. The situation in Powell County is so dire that at least one city can only be accessed by boat. Road crews, first responders, and the Kentucky National Guard are doing their best to help out, but they can't get a handle on the full scope of the damage until the water recedes.

Once the assessment is complete, the Governor will formally request an emergency disaster declaration from the Biden administration. As soon as he does, my team and I will do our part to get Federal assistance to these communities as soon as possible.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on a completely different matter, yesterday, our Democratic colleagues had planned to begin ramming through their partisan spending spree, but it seems they have had some difficulty getting to the starting line. After all, Senate Democrats, including committee chairs, are essentially being jammed with text from over in the House. Their own Members have barely been able to read this thing, let alone shape it.

So let's think back to where we were 1 year ago. Eleven-and-a-half months

ago, the Senate was also discussing a major spending package. In fact, it was the same size as what is being proposed right now—about $2 trillion—an appropriate pricetag back at the start of the crisis, but that is where the similarity actually ends.

Last March, the Senate was working overtime, in a bipartisan fashion, to craft good policy from the bottom up. I assembled bipartisan task forces. We had Republicans and Democrats and staff working around the clock to build the policies that would save our health system and our economy.

The CARES Act sustained us for almost a year of shutdowns. It funded the healthcare fight, saved small businesses, and funded Operation Warp Speed, which helped pave the way for these pioneering vaccines and preordered hundreds of millions of doses for Americans. The law sent so much relief to households that, even as the GDP declined, personal incomes and savings actually went up. Even liberal economists say President Biden has inherited an economy that was already primed for a swift recovery. It was the largest American rescue package ever. Yet it passed the Senate without one single dissenting vote because it was built the right way.

That was last March. So what about today?

Instead of heading into a dark tunnel, we are accelerating out of it: incredible vaccines, a rebounding economy. That is what the Biden administration inherited thanks to what we did last year.

Yet Washington Democrats are trying to exploit the last chapters of this crisis to pass what President Biden's Chief of Staff calls ''the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation,'' and they have told Republicans: Take it or leave it. No openness to meaningful bipartisan input. Ten Republican Senators approached President Biden and proposed cooperation on the order of hundreds of billions of dollars. They were refused. All that interested the Democrats was a partisan hodgepodge of, largely, non-COVID-related items.

Last year, the Democratic leader said:

> Sitting in your own office, writing a bill, and then demanding the other side support it is not anyone's idea of bipartisanship.

As recently as last November, he said:

> We need a true bipartisan bill—not ''this is our bill, take it or leave it.''

Another time, our friend from New York told everyone to ''go look up in the dictionary what 'bipartisanship' is. It's both parties working together, not your party doing a bill and then saying it's bipartisan.''

In less than 4 months, we have had two completely different versions of the Democratic leader. The two of them could have a fascinating debate with each other.

But look, the real tragedy here is not Senate process; it is how ill-suited this bill is to what Americans need right now. There are no policies to get schools reopened right away and no smart solutions to directly spur rehiring. Less than 1 percent of the money goes to the vaccines that will end this nightmare—only 9 percent to the entire healthcare fight altogether.

I guess it has become a rite of passage for a new Democratic President to begin with a poorly targeted spending spree that doesn't give Americans what they need.

We already laid the foundation for a roaring comeback. The Biden administration inherited a tide that was already turning, but they have chosen to ignore the approach that got us this far.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now, on one final matter, yesterday evening, House Democrats repassed their plan to give Washington unprecedented power over the way our Nation conducts elections. Just like their partisan spending spree from last week, the only thing bipartisan about the vote was the opposition.

The same party that wants to change Senate rules when they lose a vote, pack the Supreme Court when they lose a case, and throw out the electoral college every time they lose the White House now wants to forcibly rewrite 50 States' election laws from Washington. It is unprincipled. It is unwarranted. Large portions of it may well be unconstitutional. One of the key principles of American elections is that Federal officeholders cannot personally micromanage the way in which voters can hire and fire us.

Different States and localities settle questions around early voting or absentee voting or voter registration in very different ways. Washington Democrats want every county in America to have to answer all of those questions the way they want. For example, no State would be able to have a simple voter ID requirement unless they neutered it with a massive loophole, but every State would be forced to allow ballot harvesting, where paid political operatives can show up, carrying a stack of ballots with other people's names on them.

Imagine looking at this national landscape, where we have seen the losing side doubt the legitimacy of two consecutive Presidential elections, and thinking: This is the time for a sweeping, one-party rewrite of election law.

Democrats are also coming after Americans' free speech. The Federal Election Commission was set up after Watergate to be a bipartisan panel by design. The FEC intentionally needs bipartisan consensus to throw a penalty flag. Washington Democrats want to scrap that as well.

Their bill would convert the FEC into an odd-numbered, partisan body, and this partisan FEC would get even greater scope to nose around in even more of Americans' speech and Americans' activities. The bill also tramples on citizens' privacy with new mandates that would intensify ''cancel culture'' and help mobs harass people for their private views. Even the leftwing ACLU condemns this part of H.R. 1.

This is what the ACLU had to say:

> It could directly interfere with the ability of many to engage in political speech about causes that they care about and that impact their lives.

That was from the ACLU.

That is right. House Democrats have swung so far to the anti-free speech left that they have even lost the ACLU.

Speaking of political swings, Democrats who want Washington to take over elections should remember that majorities in Congress actually come and go. It would be absurd for election regulations in every precinct in America to go boomeranging back and forth every time Congress changes hands. Millions of American voters elected 50 Republican Senators and a whole lot of House Republicans to make sure that Democrats play by the rules, not rewrite the rules. For one party to seize unilateral control over elections nationwide would be a civic catastrophe.

It is worth asking: Why are Washington Democrats so desperate to forcibly rewrite election law before the next time voters decide their fates?

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The majority whip.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, some of our Republican colleagues say that America doesn't need President Biden's COVID rescue plan because ''the pandemic is nearly over.'' Funny. I have never heard them say we shouldn't spend money to help tornado victims in their States after the tornadoes were gone.

Let me say it clearly. We are not out of the woods yet. I wish we were. There are 510,000 Americans—maybe more now—who have died. The United States has 5 percent of the world's population. We have 20 percent of the COVID infections and deaths. Why? Because of poor leadership during the first year of this pandemic.

We had a President then, who is now gone, who would announce it was a hoax, and it was going to disappear by Easter, downplaying the seriousness of the situation with his fanciful flights about certain chemicals that were going to save us or whether or not we should all be gargling Lysol every morning. It made no sense, and the American people came out of that experience confused and infected, with deaths in their families. That was the reality of the first year of the pandemic.