Duckworth, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jeff Merkley, Christopher A. Coons, Richard Blumenthal, Patrick J. Leahy, Amy Klobuchar, Tina Smith, Brian Schatz, Robert Menendez, Richard J. Durbin, Martin Heinrich, Maria Cantwell.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to this motion be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, when Senators were last in this Chamber, our Democratic colleagues were shooting down amendment after amendment to ensure their largely non-COVID-related spending plan remained very liberal and purely partisan.

Republicans proposed amendments to cap extra government help for wealthier Americans, to ensure that direct checks would only go to citizens and legal residents and not to people in prison, and to rein in runaway State and local bailouts and refocus the bill on urgent COVID-related actual needs. But Democrats banded together to defeat every one of these commonsense changes. As the Democratic leader happily explained to reporters later on Saturday, his whole conference put lockstep party unity ahead of substance and ahead of bipartisan compromise.

So the nearly $2 trillion partisan spending spree that President Biden's Chief of Staff brags is ''the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation'' is on its way over to the House. Already, we hear reporting that this giveaway will simply wipe out the budget deficit of New York State and eliminate a big part of the deficit in San Francisco, courtesy of the taxpayers in Kentucky and Middle America. Already, we hear the administration saying they want some of these sweeping new welfare policies to become permanent, like a no-strings-attached benefit that disregards all the pro-work lessons of bipartisan welfare reform. Meanwhile, it only manages to spend about 1 percent on vaccinations and less than 9 percent on the entire health fight.

Democrats inherited a turning tide. The vaccine trends and economic trends were in place before the bill was ever voted on, before this President was sworn in, but they are determined to push to the front of the parade with an effort to push America to the left.

Meanwhile, House Democrats are wasting no time pursuing even more purely partisan legislation. Last Wednesday, the House passed H.R. 1, their effort to rewrite the ground rules of American elections and seize power from States and localities. Just like the spending plan, in both Chambers, once again the only thing bipartisan about the bill was the opposition.

This is House Democrats' bid to put Federal bureaucrats in charge of local election rules; to undermine voter ID requirements with massive loopholes that undermine them; to require every State to permit ballot harvesting, which lets paid political operatives produce stacks of ballots with other people's names on them; to overturn or change hundreds of State election laws; and to turn our highest election authority, the equally balanced FEC, into a partisan majority body to crack down on speech and ideas they don't like.

It is quite the recipe for rebuilding public faith in our democracy on all sides—a purely partisan effort to seize unprecedented power for Washington, DC, on a razor-thin majority. It is a hugely harmful idea at the worst possible time.

NOMINATIONS

Madam President, on a different matter, this week, the Senate is set to consider more of President Biden's nominations. I have consistently said that the President should have latitude to staff their administration with people of their choosing so long as they nominate qualified and mainstream individuals. That is why I and many other Republicans have supported many of the President's mainstream nominees.

Secretaries Austin and Vilsack were each confirmed with more than 90 votes; Secretaries Raimondo, Yellen, and Buttigieg with more than 80. Senator Blinken got 78 votes, including mine. Secretaries Cardona and Granholm each got more than 60 votes. Even with the time spent on impeachment, half of the nominees I just mentioned were confirmed faster than President Trump's nominees to the same spots, and most of them received a more bipartisan margin now than 4 years ago. So this administration is receiving perfectly fair treatment from the Senate. Frankly, the President and his team must be thrilled that Senate Republicans are proving to be more fair and more principled on personnel matters than the Democratic minority's behavior 4 years ago.

But the fact remains that millions and millions of Americans elected 50 Republican Senators—an even split—to stand against policies and personnel who lean too far to the left. That is why many of us voted against confirming Secretary Mayorkas, who stood idly by while a major crisis exploded on the border in just his first several weeks. Rather than confront the problem, he absurdly claims that a record number of unaccompanied children in custody, overflowing shelters, and catch-and-release policies during a pandemic do not actually constitute a ''crisis'' at all.

Xavier Becerra, the partisan California attorney general with no significant healthcare experience, whom the President has nominated to run Health and Human Services during COVID–19, could not even get one Republican vote to get out of committee.

So Republicans will continue to distinguish between qualified, mainstream people and nominees who are way outside the mainstream.

I have already announced I will support Judge Merrick Garland, whose nomination to be Attorney General we will vote to advance later today, but we will continue to fight hard against people who are the wrong choices for key positions. We are going to shine a bright spotlight on anyone who seems more focused on far-left ideology than serving all of the American people.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant majority leader.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I had a press conference this Sunday back home in Illinois to talk about what the American Rescue Plan means to our State. It is dramatic. Dramatic.

Millions of dollars will be coming to our State to buy vaccines. I can tell you, all across Illinois, people are asking: When is it my turn? When do I get my chance? And we want to make sure they get that chance sooner rather than later.

Think about what President Biden inherited just a few weeks ago. Surely they had found some vaccines—excellent vaccines by Pfizer and Moderna—approved by then, but he came to the White House to find that there was no plan to administer those vaccines across the Nation.

Vaccine is important, but it is of little value if it is not in the arms of Americans. So he set out to establish a standard that we would be distributing this vaccine across the United States as quickly as possible and the mechanism, the infrastructure to make certain that it was administered by professionals who know what they are doing. That is quite an undertaking. It is the largest vaccination in the history of our Nation. But President Biden said he needed help to do it—not just money for the vaccine but money for testing, money for the genomic sequencing necessary to detect variants that might be emerging in the United States. That was a major element of the bill that passed this Senate last Saturday.

He also put money in there that had already been promised to the American people. Remember when President Trump said $2,000 for every American? We agreed on a bipartisan basis. The first downpayment was last December, $600, and the remainder, $1,400, was included in the bill that passed on Saturday.

I have yet to hear a Republican Senator come to this floor and criticize that sum of money. All of them—I should say most of them have publicly supported it, and others say little or nothing about it, but no one is saying that it shouldn't be given as a result of the promise made. We kept that promise. That was part of what we were doing.

We also had a responsibility to millions of Americans who are still collecting unemployment. As of March 14,

they were going to lose their opportunity to continue that unemployment check.

There were arguments made on the floor here that these were just lazy people and that if you give them an unemployment check, they will just continue to be lazy and won't go back to work. I don't buy that. I don't believe it. Are some lazy? Well, possibly. I think the vast majority of these people are desperate. They are desperate because they have been laid off or lost their jobs and they need to keep their families together.

Unemployment benefits do that, and they also give fuel to the economy to recover. We were told that by the Chairman of the Federal Reserve and others—to put enough stimulus back in this economy so we can come out of it strong sooner rather than later. I believe that. Yet people like the Republican Senator from Ohio came to the floor talking about the recovery underway and we don't really need to do as much as President Biden had asked for. I disagree.

All across the board, the bill that we passed, whether it is money for schools or money for hospitals or money for clinics or money for administering this vaccine, was money that will be well spent in the State of Illinois and all across the United States.

Now what troubles me is this: Last year, we had two major bills for COVID relief. They talk about five. There were two major bills. The first was in March, the CARES Act that was worth $2 trillion. That bill passed the Senate after it had been engineered by Treasury Secretary Mnuchin of the Trump administration. It passed the Senate with every Senator voting yes, 96 to nothing. Every Democratic Senator voted for it.

Then came the followup bill in December, some $900 billion for more COVID relief, for a temporary, first-quarter-of-this-year fix. When you look at the final rollcall there, it was 92 to 6. All six ''no'' votes were Republicans. Every Democrat who voted, voted for it—again, a Trump proposal that we supported on the Democratic side.

So then the tables turned on January 20, and a new President came to town. Joe Biden said: Let me finish this and do it effectively. Give me an American Rescue Plan.

How many Republican Senators stood up and said: Well, since the Democrats, in the spirit of responding to this pandemic, came around and supported the Trump plans last year, we will do the same this year. The number—zero. Not one Republican Senator supported the bill that passed on Saturday. We passed it with 50 Democratic votes. That is what it took, with one Republican Senator being missing. But what a disappointment that is, to think that this pandemic and the economic crisis that followed was addressed on a bipartisan basis with every Democratic vote in the major legislation last year, and this year, under President Biden, we couldn't get one Republican Senator to join us in that effort. It is a disappointment, but I hope it isn't a portent of things to come. We have a lot to do, and we need to do it together on a bipartisan basis. The American people are going to count on us to do it.

I also might say a word about the nominations that Senator MCCONNELL referred to earlier. It is true that some of these nominees are getting votes that indicate a strong majority in support, and that does evidence Republican cooperation, and I want to thank them for joining us in that bipartisan spirit. But it evidences something else as well. These are good nominees. These are good men and women who can serve this country effectively. Given the chance, they will, and the votes that have been cast in support of them indicate that as well.

I won't go into the experience 4 years ago with the Trump nominees, but many of them had troubled records, and some of them didn't even file the necessary disclosures before their names were submitted to us for consideration. So there are a lot of things that have changed in the 4-year period of time. Now we have a chance to approve a team for President Biden and to fill out his national security team.

NOMINATION OF MERRICK BRIAN GARLAND

Madam President, the last person up is Merrick Garland, nominee for Attorney General. He is, simply put, the right nominee to lead the Justice Department. I believe that is true for three primary reasons: one, his integrity; two, his experience; and three, his humility.

Let me begin with integrity.

The Attorney General occupies a unique role in the Cabinet. Although serving at the pleasure of the President and responsible for implementing his policy initiatives, the Attorney General is also the Nation's law enforcement officer.

The AG oversees a Department that must remain impartial, unbiased, and independent. To balance these two roles requires a nominee who is beyond reproach, who understands the need to separate personal preference from constitutional principles, and who has the courage to stand steadfast in the face of political pressure. Merrick Garland is such a nominee.

As a judge of the DC Circuit for more than 20 years, he has been guided by an abiding faith in the rule of law and a firm commitment to make equal justice for all a reality. It is no surprise, then, that more than 60 former Federal judges and more than 150 former Justice Department officials, appointed by Presidents of both parties, have expressed their strong support for Judge Garland's nomination. They know that Judge Garland will carry his integrity and his independence with him in his new role, and the public will soon see the same integrity and independence in the new Department of Justice, a welcome change from the past 4 years.

Judge Garland also has the experience needed to lead the Department from the first day on the job. Before he served on the DC Circuit, Judge Garland served with distinction in multiple Justice Department roles—as a special assistant to the Attorney General, assistant U.S. Attorney, a deputy in the Criminal Division, and top adviser to the Deputy Attorney General.

We know, of course, it was Judge Merrick Garland who ably and admirably led the investigation and prosecution of the Oklahoma City bombing—the worst domestic terrorism attack, to date, in modern American history—and he will, no doubt, draw upon that experience as the Department brings to justice those who perpetrated the hideous January 6 Capitol insurrection and works to prevent further attacks.

But as Judge Garland highlighted at his hearing, his prior tenure at the Department of Justice has also given him insight into what is vital for the Department's success, from the importance of career prosecutors and agents to the breadth of the Department's responsibilities.

Finally, Judge Garland has what I believe to be a characteristic that is often overlooked when we evaluate nominees: humility. He is mindful of the Department's history, a founding rooted in protecting the civil rights enshrined in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments—and he is mindful of just how much work remains in the fight for civil rights.

He is mindful of the enormous power that prosecutors hold and the need to wield that power responsibly. In fact, he told us as much at the hearing when he quoted Robert Jackson, the Attorney General and later Supreme Court Justice, in saying:

> The citizen's safety lies in the prosecutor who tempers zeal with human kindness, who seeks truth and not victims, who serves the law and not factional purposes, and who approaches the task with humility.

He is mindful of the opportunities that this country has provided him yet remain elusive for far too many. President Biden nominated Judge Garland to serve with a team of senior Justice Department leaders.

Today, we had a hearing with Lisa Monaco, who is aspiring to be his Deputy Attorney General; Vanita Gupta, who is aspiring to be his Associate Attorney General; and, later, we will have a hearing with Kristen Clarke, who wishes to be Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights.

This is an exceptionally well-qualified team of DOJ veterans eager to serve. When the committee reported Judge Garland's nomination, I am happy to report that four Republicans joined all the Democrats, making it a bipartisan rollcall. I think it is worth quoting again. Here is what Judge Garland said:

> I come from a family where my grandparents fled anti-Semitism and persecution. The country took us in and protected us.