The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Michael D. Smith, of Virginia, to be Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 60, nays 39, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 487 Ex.]

YEAS—60

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Padilla
Bennet	Graham	Peters
Blumenthal	Hassan	Reed
Blunt	Heinrich	Romney
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Brown	Hirono	Schatz
Burr	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	Kelly	Shaheen
Capito	King	Sinema
Cardin	Klobuchar	Smith
Carper	Leahy	Stabenow
Casey	Luján	Tester
Cassidy	Manchin	Tillis
Collins	Markey	Van Hollen
Coons	Menendez	Warner
Cornyn	Merkley	Warnock
Cortez Masto	Murkowski	Warren
Duckworth	Murphy	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murray	Wicker
Feinstein	Ossoff	Wyden

NAYS—39

Barrasso	Hawley	Portman
Blackburn	Hoeven	Risch
Boozman	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Braun	Inhofe	Rubio
Cotton	Johnson	Sasse
Cramer	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Crapo	Lankford	Scott (SC)
Cruz	Lee	Shelby
Daines	Lummis	Sullivan
Ernst	Marshall	Thune
Fischer	McConnell	Toomey
Grassley	Moran	Tuberville
Hagerty	Paul	Young

NOT VOTING—1

Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). On this vote, the yeas are 60, the nays are 39.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Michael D. Smith, of Virginia, to be Chief Executive Officer of the Corporation for National and Community Service.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote on the confirmation of the Smith nomination scheduled for 5:15 p.m. instead occur at 6:45 p.m.; that upon disposition of the Smith nomination, the Senate resume legislative session and that all time in relation to S.J. Res. 29 be expired.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. Therefore, for the information of Senators, there will be two rollcall votes beginning at 6:45 p.m.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, yesterday, Chicago reported its first case of the new coronavirus variant, Omicron. Our State's health officials predicted this day would come; it did. They are actively preparing for additional cases.

The World Health Organization has identified it as a variant of concern. It has the potential for increased transmissibility and could possibly—I underline ''possibly''—evade some protections from existing vaccines.

But as we begin to learn about this variant, some hopeful signs have emerged. On Sunday, Dr. Fauci described early data on the severity of Omicron as ''encouraging.'' Additionally, today, we received preliminary findings that patients are better protected against Omicron with a third Pfizer dose.

And while it is still too soon to draw any definitive conclusions—too soon—what is clear is that the historic investments we have made—the Senate and President Biden—these investments in public health are paying off.

Thanks to the American Rescue Plan—which we passed earlier this year on, sadly, a partisan rollcall without a single Republican vote—America is more prepared. That rescue package not only funded production and distribution of lifesaving vaccines; it paved the way for public health officials to detect and track new variants like Omicron. It provided more than a billion dollars toward expanding and accelerating genomic sequencing, the process that allows us to analyze how the coronavirus is evolving and spreading in realtime, so we can respond.

Thanks to this investment today, America is sequencing roughly 80,000 virus samples a week. Before President Biden took office, we were sequencing fewer than 3,000; now, 80,000 a week. That has made a world of difference when it comes to tracking the spread of a variant.

In less than 2 weeks since the variant was discovered in South Africa, it has been identified in at least 19 States in addition to Illinois.

As we await more data on the risk Omicron poses to the public, here are three things we know. First—and it bears repeating—the best protection is to get vaccinated. Ninety-five percent of Americans are eligible, and 70 percent have already gotten at least one shot. Within days, we will hit the impressive milestone of 200 million Americans getting fully vaccinated. We need to continue to promote this incredible safety tool, and that means booster shots as well.

Second, America must continue to support the global vaccine campaign. As I have said before, COVID doesn't know borders. As long as it is circulating across the globe, the risk of virus mutation growing stronger and roaring back into the United States continues to be real.

Fortunately, the Biden administration has already taken important steps to address global vaccine inequality and get more shots to low-income countries. Just this week, USAID announced a $400 million investment in a new global vaccine access program to deliver vaccines to remote parts of the world.

I just got off the phone with Dr. Atul Gawande, a surgeon at Brigham and Women's Hospital, a prolific author, and a man who is very insightful. He has agreed to step forward and to work with Administrator Samantha Power at USAID. He is the right person for this job at this very moment. So I encourage my colleagues to let him move off the calendar and into the job as quickly as possible. We need his expertise at USAID.

The third point I would like to make is that we need to build on the American Rescue Plan's investment in public health. Effective public health systems are like smoke detectors: They can alert us to deadly dangers long before they threaten.

At the start of this pandemic, America's public health system had been ignored and underfunded for years. That is the reason why we proposed nearly $10 billion in the Build Back Better plan, which we are currently working on, to improve laboratory capacity, disease detection, the workforce, and public health preparedness. This funding will fortify our public health system at a time when it is absolutely necessary.

BUILD BACK BETTER ACT

Mr. President, on a related matter, just before Thanksgiving, the House of Representatives passed the Build Back Better Act. It is one of the most profamily pieces of legislation in modern history.

For nearly 50 years, the wealthy in America have gotten richer while the middle class has been squeezed. Build Back Better is about restoring fairness.

Four years ago, when the Republicans had their chance to use the reconciliation process, they really identified their highest priority: tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans. They continue to hold to the philosophy that if you give tax breaks to wealthy people, eventually people who are in the middle-income categories—working families—will start to see some benefits coming their way. I couldn't disagree more.

I believe investing in working families in America has always been the best investment. These are families with kids who are destined for college and even better jobs if we invest in those families and give them a fighting chance. The wealthy are going to do just fine by themselves, and they are doing pretty well, I might add.

We have got to make sure that this Build Back Better Act, which President Biden supports, really focuses on working families. And that is why the