

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, as of today there are over 1,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in 35 States and Washington, DC. The World Health Organization has now declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Thirty-one people have died in the United States already because of this virus. This includes one person in the State of New Jersey. Communities across the country, and most recently New Jersey, are confronting the possibility of seeing a spread of this virus. We also know that it is possible that, due to delays and lack of availability of testing, the actual number of those infected here in the U.S. is likely higher than what has been reported.

Every day that passes during the spread of this virus—every single day, every single hour, every single moment is critical. We must act urgently to slow its spread, to mitigate its impact. We all have a role to play in fighting the virus, each and every one of us, from our personal hygiene habits to those of us in positions of authority and the roles we can play to protect each other and to protect our communities. One of the most significant ways to do this is actually by encouraging people to stay home. Members of Congress have self-isolated. For people who have symptoms or who have severe coughs or who may have been exposed, there is an importance in social isolation, staying home when you are sick.

The challenge for us as a country is that for millions and millions of Americans this idea of staying home is not an option. Tens of millions of Americans know that if they stay home, they miss a paycheck. If they miss a paycheck, that can mean financial devastation or ruin for their family.

We are now the only industrialized nation in the world that doesn't have paid family sick leave for workers. This is an unwelcome and, unfortunately, this is a dangerous distinction now in the time of a global pandemic. This literally punishes people who are struggling, low-income workers.

Right now the choice for millions of Americans is really this: Choose between your next paycheck and caring for your sick child. Choose between going to work sick or having to skip a meal. Choose between your health and well-being or your family's financial security. That choice, unfortunately, even before this pandemic, was a choice that many Americans knew—that the people who are handling our food, the people who work in our restaurants, and the people who work with our elderly often go to work sick in this country helping the normal flu and other illnesses spread. In the case of a pandemic which has a mortality rate of potentially five or ten times that of the flu, this is, unfortunately, a tragic choice that families are trying to make.

According to the National Partnership for Women and Families, 70 percent of the lowest income workers do not have a single paid sick day. They

also report that 81 percent of people working in the food service industry—let me say that again: 81 percent of people working in our food service industry—and 75 percent of childcare center workers do not have access to paid sick leave. This is disproportionately seen in communities of color.

Think about the choice you make. Your child is sick, you are showing signs but you know if you do not go to work, you will not be able to make rent, you will not be able to put food on the table, you will miss a car payment, which means your car will be repossessed. These are choices that don't just put the families in crisis but they put us all at risk.

The disparity in access to preventive care is also an issue. There are disparities in access to healthcare and affordable medicine for people all across our country—millions and millions of people. This is already before the global pandemic is a health crisis. The continued and unmitigated spread of COVID-19 could have disastrous impacts on people in communities that already have this vulnerability. In my community, where I live, where I hopefully will go home this weekend, in Newark, NJ, the median income for the census tract I live in is about \$14,000, according to the last census. That is \$14,000 per household. I know that public health emergencies can quickly become economic disasters for those who are already struggling in the economic margins of our country.

As we work together to combat the spread of this virus, we need to remember that any of us is only as healthy as our most vulnerable neighbors. In other words, as Martin Luther King said years ago, when he said "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere," well, the virus anywhere is a threat to the health and safety of us everywhere.

That is why we need to pass the bill introduced by Senator PATTY MURRAY to guarantee 7 days of sick leave for all workers and critically guarantee 14 days of paid sick leave during public health emergencies. That is an act of self-interest.

Again, I know with over 80 percent of those who handle our food in restaurants, if those folks do not have paid family leave, they are now economically incentivized to go to work sick. It can cause a greater spread of the virus.

Paid sick and family leave is a public health and safety issue, plain and simple. It is about economic justice and economic strength and security, but it is a public health issue for us all. As we prepare to fight this virus, we need to do the things that keep our people, our communities, and our country safe, healthy, and strong. That means joining with the rest of our industrial nations and having paid family sick leave. That means opening up and modernizing the Unemployment Insurance Act, because workers who lose a paycheck because their factory closes or

their restaurant closes or they lost childcare should be able to access the critical benefits they need to help their family get by. That means we also expand SNAP benefits for those kids who are forced to stay at home and from school and may miss meals.

To take on this virus, to protect all of our communities, to ensure the strength of our economy, and to ensure our health, we need to take a comprehensive and inclusive approach. That means leaving no one behind, because we are all in this crisis together.

I have seen challenges from 9/11 to when I was mayor and we had Hurricane Sandy hit. It was the strength of our community in that region around 9/11. It was the strength of that community during that terrible storm. I remember seeing that the strength was that we stood up for each other and stood by each other—neighbors opening up their homes, people lending a hand, people showing sacrifice for each other. That is the American way. Those values and virtues should be reflected in our policy. We are weakened and more vulnerable right now because we do not have commonsense policies that other countries take for granted, like paid family leave. We in the U.S. Senate should act for the love of each other and love of country, for the strength and security and health of our well-being for each other.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I just want to first say that I agree with everything the Senator from New Jersey just said, and I think it is important to heed his message, because as of this afternoon, we are officially facing a global pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic has spread to more than 100 countries around the world. The World Health Organization has declared it a pandemic. The economic repercussions have taken on a global dimension. This is also a virus that is impacting Americans on a very personal dimension.

Massachusetts residents are worried about keeping their children, their families, and themselves safe. Day to day, even hour to hour, there is a lot of uncertainty during this public health emergency. Will I be able to work? Will I be able to get medical care? Will I be able to pay the mortgage or the rent?

There is one thing I want my constituents to know for certain. I share your concern for your loved ones, and your safety is my top priority. We need our response to this emergency to match the seriousness of the crisis.

I commend the Governors and mayors across this country who have stepped up and provided leadership to their constituents, including Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, who has wisely and swiftly declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts, and our great mayor of Boston, Martin Walsh, who has led early on this issue to make sure that we deal with this crisis.

We need that leadership more than ever because we are seeing a dangerous complete abdication of leadership from Donald Trump. His mismanagement of this crisis is unconscionable. It is immoral, and the harm it is causing the American people is an injustice. The Trump administration has let this crisis spin out of control.

President Trump has repeatedly said the risk is low and minimized the implications of the disease, even saying that Americans are unlikely to die from an infection. But just today, Dr. Tony Fauci, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the Nation's leading expert on infectious diseases, explained that coronavirus is 10 times more lethal than the flu. The administration overruled health officials who wanted to recommend that the elderly and physically fragile Americans be advised not to fly.

Trump has called efforts to draw attention to the real risk of coronavirus, the new Democrat-created "hoax." Just today, it is being reported that the White House has ordered top officials to treat top-level coronavirus meetings as classified, further hampering information sharing in our response to this virus.

We saw what a lack of transparency, misinformation, and denial did in China with the spread of this virus. We cannot allow that to happen in the United States of America. The bottom line: Families need clear, nonbiased, accurate, and reassuring information. They need it from public health officials. They need it from their elected leaders. There should be no partisanship in pandemics.

The President and his administration have undermined science and our scientists. We have the best scientists in the world. We must put their expertise to work to solve this challenge. We have shown that we can do that. Congress came together and quickly passed \$8.3 billion in emergency funding to respond to this crisis, but we can do much more.

First, the President should immediately declare the coronavirus pandemic an emergency under the Stafford Act. That direction would allow FEMA to access over \$42 billion in disaster relief funds and support States and communities directly as they deal with the spread of this virus. I am officially calling on President Trump to do that today: Declare this an emergency under the Stafford Act. Free up the FEMA money of \$42 billion in disaster relief so that we can work on this issue right now, dealing with it in a way that reflects the seriousness of the threat. The President should act today.

Second, we need widespread and free coronavirus testing and affordable treatment for all.

Third, we need to increase the Federal Medicaid assistance percentage. This would increase the amount of Federal dollars that go into Medicaid, immediately pumping more resources

into States to deal with this health crisis. We did this during the great recession as a way to assist States in providing medical care. We should do it again, and I will be introducing legislation to accomplish that.

Fourth, we need to ensure paid sick leave for our workers. We need to pass Senator PATTY MURRAY's legislation to provide an additional 14 days' sick leave immediately in the event of any public health emergency, including the current coronavirus crisis.

Fifth, we need to enhance unemployment insurance and expand and support programs like SNAP and Women, Infants, and Children and school lunch and other initiatives to support food security. Banks should suspend payments on mortgages for those struggling with the economic impacts of this crisis, and we should provide rental assistance for those who need it.

Sixth, we need to protect consumers, and that includes shielding them from scams and price gouging, which I called on Amazon to do. Amazon took action by removing bad actors from the site who were charging upwards of \$400 for hand sanitizer. No one should be allowed to reap a windfall from fear and human suffering.

We need to provide clear guidance on protections for frontline health workers and access to needed protective equipment. In a pandemic, our healthcare workers are heroes, but these heroes need help. We have to make sure they get the protective gear they need.

The coronavirus is not the first and it will not be the last biothreat the United States faces. That is why I have introduced legislation that provides \$1 billion for research into a universal coronavirus vaccine that prevents the next biothreat that would come in the form of a coronavirus. They morph into different types of coronaviruses. We have to plan for the future. We need to find a universal coronavirus vaccine now, and we have to fund it, which is why I am asking for \$1 billion for that solution to be found.

Sadly, the reality is that this pandemic is going to get worse before it gets better. But this is our call, and this is our time to come together. We all have a responsibility to act, to show leadership, and to support those who are most vulnerable and will be most impacted by this virus. The elderly in nursing homes, our young children, the uninsured, the undocumented—they need our help right now. These are the lives to be saved, livelihoods to be protected, and futures to ensure.

I will continue to work with my colleagues and fight for legislation that provides Massachusetts residents and businesses and those all across our country with the resources they need. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in this commitment to action.

With that, I yield back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I will have to tell you and all of my colleagues, as they probably know, this has been a fairly tough month for my fellow Tennesseans.

As you know, last week, a tornado tore through eight counties. This started in West Tennessee and exited through Middle Tennessee up on the plateau of our great State. This left multiple communities absolutely devastated. We have mourned the loss of life and livelihoods and property.

I want to, again, thank President Trump for coming to Tennessee to offer his support and for listening to those who were so adversely impacted by this storm and for being there to encourage the emergency management officials, the volunteers, and all of the elected community officials.

We have been encouraged that our Tennesseans have been joined from volunteers all across the country who have shown up to help. They have donated their time, their supplies, and their money to our restoration and rebuilding and recovery and cleanup efforts. To all of those who have volunteered and offered their support, you have made such a difference in the lives of so many Tennessee families. We know this is going to be a long and difficult recovery.

After all of this occurred, on Wednesday of last week, Tennessee health officials confirmed our first case of coronavirus. It was in a patient just south of Nashville in Williamson County.

With all that said, that is a lot to handle in any given week, but Tennesseans and all Americans should be encouraged that there is a lot of good work that is taking place. As I said, the rebuilding efforts span all of those counties in our State.

And then, of course, right there in Nashville are efforts to combat the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus. The Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Denison Lab is one of the top 20 labs in the world that is studying this disease. For over 25 years, they received Federal grants for their research into how these viruses make us sick, and they are currently helping with the development of treatments, antivirals, and vaccines to deal with coronaviruses, and especially the COVID-19. I am just so pleased with the progress they are making.

Today I want to draw attention to a threat that has, again, been highlighted because of this coronavirus outbreak. Pharmaceuticals are no different from other products in that they