

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, across our country, we are seeing cities, schools, businesses, and other organizations take the necessary and serious precautions to keep the American people safe from the spread of the coronavirus. School districts, colleges, and universities are canceling in-person classes, churches are moving services online, professional sports teams are hitting pause on their regular season, airlines are canceling flights, and many Main Street businesses are closing their doors.

I know that all of this is a little disorienting and certainly alarming. But while these measures aren't normal, it is a sign that we are heeding advice from the experts, people like Dr. Fauci and organizations like the Centers for Disease Control. It is a sign that we are doing what we can to prevent or at least slow down community spread. It is a sign that we are standing together and making progress, ultimately expecting that we will get through this together. The difficult decisions that need to be made by elected officials, business owners, and community leaders when they decide to shut down normal parts of our daily lives—these are not easy decisions for them to make.

Despite the public health benefits these closures will provide, we are also expecting other serious—mainly economic—consequences. Our economic engine is being brought to a halt as people are staying home rather than producing, and small businesses and their employees in particular are feeling the impact.

Jason Phillips is a manager at Zoli's Pizza in Fort Worth, TX, and he has been in the service industry for more than 20 years. Still, he said he has never been in a situation quite like this one. He said this past Saturday that Zoli's Pizza had about half the number of customers they have come to expect.

Steven Startz has experienced a similar struggle. Last November, he opened a new restaurant in New Braunfels, TX, just north of San Antonio, called Le Citron European Cafe and Bistro. The first year for any new restaurant is bound to be tough. As luck would have it, a week after they opened, an oven broke, and it had to be replaced. But nothing has prepared Steven for the months of February and March, what they would bring. He was hoping, as you might imagine, for an uptick in tourists, which would mean more business, but instead a pandemic has kept everybody at home. Rather than a positive bump in the business, revenue for his young restaurant is down 60 percent. As a result, he has had to cut staff, and he hasn't hired replacements for the employees he has recently lost.

This is an all-too-familiar struggle for millions of Americans who are unable to go to work during this pandemic and are facing serious economic uncertainty about their future. Those in the service industry—especially

those who rely on tips—are among the hardest hit.

I am glad to say that soon the Senate will take action to provide additional relief. As the Presiding Officer knows, we passed an \$8.3 billion emergency package to help fast-track discovery of a vaccine and to make sure that our healthcare sector is prepared for what is coming at it, or at least better prepared.

The House has now passed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which we are in the process of taking up and will hopefully finish this week, and then I expect there will be a third installment—a stimulus package that Treasury Secretary Mnuchin will be up here on the Hill talking about today to try to help employees and employers and entire industries survive this economic trauma.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act will help protect both the physical and financial health of our country by supporting workers and their families impacted by the virus. It will remove financial barriers for Texans who need access to coronavirus testing, regardless of income or insurance coverage.

This is one of the things I talked to Governor Abbott about in particular. He said that there are two things that Texas needs. He said it is more testing and it is more protective equipment, personal protective equipment—PPEs, as they are called—in order for this testing to take place.

While it is still true—according to the Centers for Disease Control—that you should not be tested unless you are experiencing symptoms and referred by a healthcare provider, it is clear that more testing is going to be needed, and indeed we have heard from the President and the Vice President and the administration in general that we expect a huge ramping up of the capacity to test people so they can know whether they are positive and they need to stay in isolation or possibly need healthcare treatment or whether, like the President and one of our colleagues here, Senator GRAHAM, they are negative, and obviously the peace of mind that comes with that. This legislation removes all financial barriers for that testing.

For those who have private insurance, it requires that all plans cover the cost of testing, including the cost of a provider, an urgent care center, and emergency room visits in order to get tested. As I said, right now, CDC protocol calls for a healthcare provider to make a diagnosis based on symptoms that would then lead to a test.

Those are the same zero-cost measures that would apply to those covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and TRICARE.

It also requires the National Disaster Medical System to reimburse the cost of testing for patients who are uninsured.

In short, the bottom line is, no one will have to pay to be tested for the coronavirus, period.

This legislation also includes a range of provisions to provide financial security for those who are unable to work, and that is because they are protecting the public health. It will create a new Federal emergency paid sick leave program for those impacted by the coronavirus. That means that any Texan—any American who is diagnosed, quarantining, or caring for a dependent who was impacted by this virus will be able to take 14 days of paid sick leave. And many Texas workers will be able to access 12 weeks of paid leave for virus-related long-term absences. These protections include workers who stay home to care for their loved ones, including staying home with their kids due to school closures.

This bill also makes changes to unemployment insurance. It will temporarily waive requirements for workers to prove they are actively searching for work during the public health emergency response, and it will provide \$1 billion in emergency grants for States to support processing and paying unemployment insurance benefits. In other words, we know that people are staying home because their employers have told them their businesses have been shut down. Even though they are not sick, they are suffering financial loss. The purpose of this is to make sure that through the vehicle of unemployment insurance, they do get some money so that they can take care of their necessities and keep putting food on the table.

This bill also takes serious steps to strengthen food security for those who are struggling with reliable access to healthy meals. This is one of the things I heard from a friend of mine out in West Texas just today concerned about the food banks that provide a safety net for people without access to regular, healthy food. This bill actually will send \$400 million to local food banks, which are supporting those low-income families across the country, including in places like West Texas.

We know that older Americans are the most vulnerable when it comes to the coronavirus, and many are afraid to leave their homes at the risk of getting sick. This legislation provides a quarter of a billion dollars for the senior nutrition program to provide home-delivered meals to low-income seniors. It also provides half a billion dollars for Federal food stamps. It provides flexibility on work requirements, so those who lose their jobs or aren't able to work can receive assistance when they need it the most.

I mentioned the food banks and the school lunch program. Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture approved a request from Texas with regard to school lunches. Millions of Texas students are currently eligible for free lunch programs, but, obviously, when the schools close, they don't get access to that nutrition. But thanks to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Texas schools can continue to serve

free meals to low-income students, even when their schools are closed.

This legislation also includes a range of measures to support healthcare workers, veterans, small businesses, and countless Texans who are struggling financially as a result of this pandemic.

Of course, we know we are all racing against the clock to respond to this virus, and it is important for Congress to act promptly to demonstrate to the American people that we understand the problem and that we are using every tool in our toolbox to respond to this crisis on their behalf.

In any major event—whether it is a natural disaster or a pandemic—we need an all-of-government response. All of us need to be cooperating and working on the same page, moving as efficiently as we possibly can.

As I said, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act builds on the \$8.3 billion emergency spending bill that was signed into law by President Trump earlier this month. It also complements the national emergency declaration made by President Trump last week and Governor Abbott's disaster declaration for the State of Texas. That is why I plan to support this bill when a vote is scheduled.

I know there are other Senators who have said they have good ideas. Many of them are intriguing and I think would make a positive addition to this legislation, but I think in times like this, the thing we need to do is to work together and function expeditiously to get this legislation passed. And because we know there is going to be another installment—a third installment—to respond to the coronavirus, perhaps those other good ideas can be included in that additional legislation, which we will pass before we recess.

I was interested to hear the majority leader say that we will not recess until we take up and pass that third installment. I think his sense of urgency and his sense of determination and focus is well justified, and I congratulate him for that. I think we need to all pull together in a similar spirit of unity.

I thank the Trump administration, especially Treasury Secretary Mnuchin, for working so quickly with Speaker PELOSI to build this package so that we can provide relief for American workers and families as soon as possible.

This is not the first bill to strengthen our response to the coronavirus, and it will not be our last. As I said, there is a bipartisan commitment to passing the third phase to strengthen our economy and support the industries and businesses that have been hit the hardest by this pandemic.

Leader MCCONNELL has made clear his commitment to finding a bold, bipartisan solution to the economic challenges we are facing and will continue to face in the months ahead, and I am proud to support this effort.

While conversations continue regarding the next phase of our coronavirus

response and what that may look like, I believe it is time to pass the Families First Coronavirus Response Act so that we provide this needed relief to the American people as soon as possible.

(Mr. SULLIVAN assumed the Chair.)

RECESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 2:15 p.m.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:03 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. CAPITO).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The Senator from New Jersey.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, first of all, I want to thank the staff here in the Senate. Even in these difficult times, they answer the call of doing the work of the American people, and I want to appreciate their being here so that the Senate can conduct its work. They are essential to being able to do that. So I want to acknowledge that.

I come to the floor today as our country grapples with a global pandemic that, tragically, has claimed the lives of thousands of people around the world, including dozens throughout the United States and three in my home State of New Jersey.

I come to the floor because I hope that people understand the fierce urgency of "now"—the fierce urgency of "now." This is a public health crisis, and we can't wait to act.

The rapid spread of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, has disrupted our daily lives. It has destabilized our economy and has imposed an enormous strain on our healthcare system.

I think many failed to grasp the scope of this threat—the lack of a national response just as the virus began to reach America's shores. But I am not here to talk today about where the administration went wrong; I am here to talk about how it can start making things right.

If there is anything we have learned in recent weeks, it is that you have to be proactive. In the past week, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases here in the United States jumped from around 1,000 to well over 4,000. While other countries were testing thousands of people, the United States was testing mere dozens. While other countries were staging makeshift hospitals, we were overloading ours. While other countries implemented aggressive social distancing measures to limit the spread of COVID-19, our government sent mixed signals to the American people about the sacrifices they must make in order to save, maybe, their lives and, if not, the lives of others.

State leaders like my own Governor, Phil Murphy, stepped in to fill the

leadership void. Earlier this week, he, along with the Governors of New York and Connecticut, imposed new restrictions on restaurants, shops, and other public gathering spaces. These are tough, unquestionably, but we need every New Jerseyan, as well as every American, to take Federal and State recommendations about social distancing seriously, avoiding gatherings of more than 10 people, washing your hands frequently, and if you feel sick, staying home and calling your healthcare provider immediately.

We all need to be part of the solution or we can become part of the statistics. We all need to be part of the solution. This is one time in which we all must come together as Americans and be part of the solution so that we are not part of the statistics.

Already families are feeling the impact, whether in lost wages, smaller paychecks, school closures, restaurant curfews, or outright job losses. That is why I am calling on the Senate to act today—today—on legislation that will provide paid leave and unemployment assistance to impacted workers, food assistance to children and seniors, more funding for Medicaid. We cannot leave families alone to weather the storm.

We also need to do more to help restaurants and shops and other businesses struggling with the economic fallout of the coronavirus from mandatory curfews to supply chain shortages, to decreased demand for their services. They need help. At the end of the day, we want them to be able to survive the crisis in order to offer the employment that will be necessary to revive the economy.

But we must remember that this is first and foremost a public health crisis. The wealth of our Nation will ultimately depend on the health of our Nation. Nothing economically will be solved without dealing with the health of the American people, and we cannot ignore the demands that COVID-19 will make on our healthcare sector and, especially, hospitals in the days and weeks to come.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC, has projected that between 160 million and 214 million people could contract COVID-19 in the United States and that between 2.4 million and 21 million of those infected could require hospitalization. As a means of comparison, our hospital system has less than 1 million staffed beds, which would be inadequate even under the CDC's most optimistic projections.

Hospitals must also have the resources and equipment available to treat the expected influx of patients. There is a significant concern that the Nation's supply of mechanical respirators and ventilators is inadequate to meet the exponential need we will likely experience in the coming weeks and months. The latest data indicates that there may be only 62,000 hospital ventilators in the entire nation. Even