

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

if only half of those hospitalized require ventilation, our supply would be wholly inadequate to fill the demand.

Healthcare workers also need protective gear to do their lifesaving work without risking infection to themselves. Unfortunately, there have been multiple reports of shortages of personal protective equipment even during the opening days of this outbreak. Failure to protect our healthcare workers and support staff would cause a cascading effect that would cause our entire response to collapse.

Simply put, we need the Federal Government to step in and provide real leadership. In the midst of a pandemic, State and local governments should not be left on their own, scrambling to find or purchase ventilators for patients, personal protective gear for healthcare workers, and other critical medical supplies. The Federal Government has a tremendous obligation and an opportunity to help save lives by assisting State and local governments in locating resources, using existing authorities to increase manufacturing of ventilators and other critical equipment, and preparing for the staging of temporary hospitals and beds, and more.

Let's look at military facilities that have been closed. There is one in my State. Let's open them up. Let's construct MASH units. Let's not wait. Let's rent out hotels that are closing. These are some of the many actions that can be taken if we are decisive in our work. That is why I am calling on the President to immediately exercise the powers authorized by the Defense Production Act to defend the health and safety of the American people in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic.

While the administration's response has so far lacked the energy this crisis calls for, invoking the powers vested in the Defense Production Act will enable the Federal Government to step up and take the types of aggressive steps needed in this time of uncertainty. It is that act that can give the Federal Government the power to say: We are going to become your partner. We want to infuse massive amounts of money to create the ventilators that we need, the personal protective gear that we need, and if we can't get you to produce it, we are going to produce it.

We need to use the power of the Federal Government to have the type of response that this moment calls for, that this crisis calls for. That is what government in its most significant moment is supposed to be all about. That is really what the Federal Government is supposed to be all about. What States cannot individually do or individual communities cannot do, it is the power of the Federal Government that can do it. We must be willing to mobilize that power.

It is time the United States of America live up to its history of defeating extraordinary challenges and prevailing in the face of great uncertainty. It is time to harness the inge-

nuity of our people, the might of our manufacturing base, and the wisdom of our healthcare experts to confront COVID-19 to protect our families and our communities, to slow the spread of the virus so we don't overwhelm our hospitals so that we can save lives.

I have seen some of the projections. I hope, for God's sake, they are wrong. But we will lose many people unless we all take this seriously and unless we act. This is a moment for action and to show the world once again that there is no challenge too great for the American people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. JONES. Madam President, today I want to talk just briefly about all that we can do. I know we are facing an emergency in this country. We are facing a healthcare crisis.

Instead of talking about all that is going on here in Congress—and there is a lot going on that the people of America need to understand. You see empty Chambers right now, but the fact is, we are trying to do those things necessary to stop the spread of this virus as well.

I want to talk a little bit about what we can do as Americans to protect ourselves and our country. In doing so, I am thinking back to an old friend of mine from my younger days.

Back when I was a kid, the National Park Service and others were concerned about the forest fires around the country, and they came up with what is now an old friend of mine: Smokey Bear. Everybody remembers Smokey Bear. You still see Smokey on occasion because only you can prevent forest fires.

Well, folks, we have forest fires raging around this country right now in the form of COVID-19, and only you can prevent the spread of that forest fire, the COVID-19 virus—only you. We have healthcare responders out there. We have emergency responders, people who are doing amazing work right now responding to this virus. But it is up to us. It is up to you. Only you can prevent the spread by doing those things necessary to try to protect your communities. The social distancing that people are talking about, the hand washing—all of those things are so important that we have to do as individuals to make sure we flatten that curve.

You don't need to be going on spring break or vacation right now—none of this. With shutting down these businesses and things and people being at home, this is not vacation time. You can use it, but it is not a time to go out on vacation, to do those kinds of things. It is a time to try to protect yourself and your communities.

Don't go out and try to get tested unless you have symptoms and have talked to your healthcare provider. In Alabama right now, we are seeing long

lines of folks who are lined up at a private testing facility to try to get tested. I don't know all the protocols that they have, but I know my friends at the University of Alabama in Birmingham—in the infectious disease center—with whom I have met and talked on a regular basis, say that the odds are that a number of those people in those lines don't need to test right now. They are concerned. Everybody is worried. Everybody wants to know. But the fact is, there are not enough tests out there for everyone just yet. We are getting there. More and more tests are coming online.

We also have to be concerned about the equipment—the swabs that are used, the test tubes that have to be used. Those are the things we are running in short supply of as well.

So unless you have those symptoms, unless you see that you are getting sick, stay home. Stay with your families. We are going to be inconvenienced for some time, but I think we need to do all we can to make those inconveniences as short-lived as possible. The short-term pain will mean long-term gain for all of us, but only if we follow the best practices that the CDC and all our departments of public health are talking about right now.

We have legislative packages that are coming over from the House. We have more. I can tell you, for my folks in Alabama and the folks across the United States, your U.S. Senators on both sides of the aisle are working very hard to try to minimize this impact. There are things we can do now, and we are trying to get those done. There are things we can do to take care of small businesses and families, and we are working very hard to make sure those things get done now.

Also, keep this in mind: This is going to be a work in progress. This is not something we know the long-term implications of just yet. Our goal is to blunt that curve, as you have seen Dr. Fauci and others talking about, to try to stem the tide of this virus, to make it to where it is going to be manageable in our healthcare systems. If we can do that, we can better assess how we can protect small businesses and how we can protect working families and make sure they have the income they need to get by on a daily basis, knowing that when this crisis does subside, they can get back to work and we can get this economy popping, as the President said earlier today. That is our goal. That is what we are trying to do.

We also have to take a deep look at ourselves, I believe. Folks across the country need to take a deep look and see what we can do as States, as Members of Congress, and as American people to do better on our healthcare system, which right now is under increasing strain and stresses with this pandemic virus. We need to see, structurally, those kinds of things that can help stem the tide of this virus but also put in place things that are going to