

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, negotiations on the third phase of the coronavirus legislation went late into the night last night and will continue through the day today.

I have spoken to Speaker PELOSI and Secretary Mnuchin several times, as well as President Trump, to keep them apprised as we continue the work through a number of issues. In fact, I just had a very good, very detailed phone call with Secretary Mnuchin—or “Steve and Chuck,” as he prefers to call it. We discussed many of the outstanding issues, and we are making very good progress. I have every expectation that this progress will continue throughout the day. Democratic negotiators will meet with their Republican counterparts throughout the day to continue hammering out the details.

The Senate is here, we are working, and we are all eager to come to a bipartisan agreement as soon as humanly possible.

There are still a number of priorities that Democrats continue to fight for in the package that is now being assembled.

As I have made clear, Democrats have two primary goals, broadly defined, in this next phase of coronavirus legislation. One is to address the impending public health crisis head-on with a massive infusion of resources to our hospitals, our medical facilities, and our other public health infrastructure. The second priority is to put workers first. In fact, our proposal, which we laid out as early as Monday, is entitled “Workers First.”

Democrats want to do as much as possible to prepare our healthcare system, and we want to give Americans who are most immediately affected by the economic slowdown ample relief so they can weather the storm over the long haul. So, on healthcare, Democrats are fighting for a Marshall Plan for our public health infrastructure.

We need hundreds of billions of dollars for ventilators, testing equipment, gloves, masks, ICU beds, and PPE, or personal protective equipment, for our frontline medical workers.

I spoke to the head of the nurses union in New York yesterday. They are short of masks. These brave nurses are going to work, doing their job, but they don't have the right equipment that they need.

Money must go to our hospitals and our nursing homes, our community health centers, and our State and local governments. This can neither wait for a future bill nor a supplemental package. We need it right now, not 2 weeks from now.

A senior doctor at Maimonides hospital in Brooklyn, NY, wrote to me yesterday. Here is what the doctor said:

I'm writing to you in a move of desperation. Currently, we have severe shortages in the basic necessities needed to fight the disease and protect health care workers. Disposable masks and gowns are in such short

supply, we re-use them until they fall apart. We don't have adequate supplies of supportive medicines. Beds, ventilators, nurses and critical care doctors are also needed. We need a national response to this disease.

I urge my colleagues to hear the urgency and strain in this brave doctor's voice, the desperation in his warning. If we don't provide these resources right now, what is already a dire situation will—not could—become catastrophic. It will affect hospitals everywhere: big-city hospitals, medium-sized suburban hospitals, and small rural hospitals. Many of them will go under in a short period of time.

So we need a Marshall Plan for our public health infrastructure, and it must be in this legislation, in the opinion of the Democratic caucus.

As we have made clear from the beginning, we must also put workers first. That means a dramatic expansion and reform of unemployment insurance. We need unemployment insurance on steroids. Some are calling it “employment insurance.” It must be easier to access. It must cover many more Americans during this crisis, including Americans who have nontraditional employment.

It must provide more generous benefits. Workers who are laid off should receive a paycheck equal to what they were receiving while employed. Workers must be protected, whether they work for businesses small, medium, or large.

The plan we have would allow them to get unemployment insurance quickly. They would be furloughed. So they would stay as employees—even though they weren't working—of their employer, so that when, God-willing, this crisis ends, they can go back to their employer and the businesses that are now closed and decimated can start running again.

We propose that this be not just a one-shot deal but a paycheck every work period, and it should go for as long as the crisis lasts. We want to fund it for at least 4 months, maybe 6. If the crisis ends more quickly, of course, we might be able to terminate it, but we need to give the workers of America the assurance that they will have paychecks. The same amount of resources that they had before this crisis they should have now, and it will occur ongoing until we beat this horrible disease.

There are other things we must do for American families as well. We should greatly expand paid sick leave and family leave. We need to expand food assistance. The kids who go to school get their best meals, many of them, at the school lunch or school breakfast. They need to be fed. Others who lose work, they need food help right away.

I believe our students are under strain. Many of their colleges are gone. Those who have just gotten out of school have difficult employment possibilities. We should cancel student loan payments during the course of the crisis, both principal and interest.

I spoke to the President about this yesterday. He said he was sympathetic. He said at the podium yesterday that interest payments he would cancel, but I think we need to do more.

We also must rescue small and medium-sized businesses with a generous loan program, so long as they protect their workers. They have other expenses. We will take care of their workers under the expanded unemployment program and on the small business program, but they have other expenses. We don't want them going under when these are good, ongoing businesses that did nothing wrong. They have to come back. So small business really needs help.

And, if we are going to bail out any industry, particularly the big companies, we have to include strict conditions that put workers first: no layoffs, no salary cuts for workers or salary increases for corporate executives, guarantees that workers be rehired at their previous wages once the crisis abates, and no stock buybacks.

I have heard the President mention that he is against stock buybacks in the past. So when I called him yesterday, I said: Make it clear. It is not in the bill that has been put before us, but Democrats will insist that it be in any proposal once we come together in a bipartisan way, as we are doing now.

Democrats have several other priorities, as well, and we are working through each of them with our Republican colleagues even as we speak. As I said, I had a wonderful—well, I had a very good—conversation. I will not go too far, but I had a very good conversation with Secretary Mnuchin, and we are making good progress on many of the issues that we Democrats feel are important.

One other need, by the way—because we do have other needs—is that I want to emphasize that one of the issues that is quickly emerging is that State and local governments are running out of cash and may soon be broke. Governors, mayors, county executives, county officials, town officials—Democratic and Republican alike—are clamoring for help. We must provide it. They are on the frontlines.

So, in conclusion, I have no illusions about the difficulty of putting together legislation this momentous in this short a period of time, but all parties are working in good faith and as fast as possible to see that we accomplish the task at hand.

Of course, far greater than our challenges here in Congress are the challenges that now confront the American people. Working families are at home without a paycheck, with no knowledge of when the next one might arrive. Small businesses are watching the labor of their lives teeter on the brink of collapse.

I spoke to a small business owner. He had spent 8 years getting his business to be successful. It just had begun to be that way, and now his doors are closed and his employees are furloughed. We have to help people like that.

Our healthcare workers, men and women who perform extraordinarily difficult jobs even in ordinary times, are now asked to bear additional burdens. But know this, healthcare workers: You are our heroes. America stands with you, and Democrats are fighting to help every one of the emergency workers during this crisis.

So, to our healthcare workers and to every American out there finding their way through these challenging times: Stay strong. We are working to provide you the relief to see you through the crisis. We will get it done—Democrats, Republicans—together. Once the scourge of this virus has passed, we will come back stronger and even more resilient.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt told a generation facing its own national crisis:

This great Nation will endure as it [always] has endured. It will revive and it will prosper . . . [because there] is no unsolvable problem if we face it wisely and courageously.

With wisdom and with courage, we will endeavor to finish the job here in Congress—whatever it takes.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, Senators' bipartisan discussions continued all day yesterday and through the night. Both sides' negotiators, with the administration, are continuing to work toward a bipartisan agreement on major legislation to support American workers and families, protect small businesses, help to stabilize our economy, and put more resources on the frontlines of our healthcare battle against the coronavirus.

As of now, an agreement has yet to be finalized, but our committee chairs, their Democratic counterparts, and President Trump's representatives are making important progress.

Yesterday, I took action on the floor to keep the process moving along with the urgency that it demands. By rule, it set up our first procedural vote for tomorrow, and then, on Monday, the Senate will vote on passage.

It has only been 2 days since Senate Republicans introduced the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act to give shape and structure to these urgent discussions. We put forward four objectives:

First, put emergency cash in the hands of individuals and families as quickly as possible.

Second, deliver the major relief that American small businesses need at this unprecedented time, and deliver it fast.

Three, help bring some stability to our economy and prevent as many layoffs as possible.

Four, continue to rush resources to the frontline healthcare workers and providers who are actually treating patients.

And perhaps most important of all, we looked specifically for policies that could do all of the above as quickly as humanly possible.

Small businesses all across the country have made it clear: If they are going to keep their lights on and keep their employees on payroll, they need help, and they need it now.

Americans who have already been laid off due to this crisis have made it clear they need help and they need it now. Key national industries which are hemorrhaging business through no fault of their own but due to the government's own public health guidance have made it clear: In order to retain their workers, they need help, and they need it now.

In particular, every single American who has opened a newspaper or turned on the television in the last week has heard from our brave nurses, doctors, first responders, and public health experts: If our Nation is going to punch back and beat this virus, the people on the medical frontlines need our help, and they need it now.

Senate Republicans put out our starting proposal as fast as we could. Then I created a structure for bipartisan discussions to begin as fast as they could. No legislation will move through the Senate that does not contain ideas from both parties. That is the way this body is designed. So these bipartisan talks have been essential, and they are ongoing, but what we need to do now is move forward.

Now, 2 days ago the press reported that a senior Member of the House Democratic leadership told his colleagues: "This is a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision"—a senior Member of the House Democratic leadership.

Well, let me suggest that that is exactly—exactly—the wrong approach right now. That is the kind of thinking that could bog down these urgent discussions. That is the kind of mindset that the American people cannot afford for their elected representatives to adopt. I hope it does not describe the view of our own Senate Democratic colleagues as we try to close out these talks.

More Americans are being laid off every day. More small businesses are being forced to shed payroll every day. Our nurses and doctors are running lower on key supplies every day. This is not a political opportunity. This is not a political opportunity. This is a national emergency. It is time to come together, finalize the results of our bipartisan discussions, and then close this out.

Earlier this week, I had the Senate move quickly to pass the more modest bill that came over from the Democratic House of Representatives. I didn't believe it was perfect—far from it. But Senate Republicans did not

delay it needlessly. We did not try to originate our own version and burn several more days trying to fit them together. Instead, we treated that bill with the bipartisanship and urgency this crisis requires. Since then, the situation has only grown more dire, so I hope that our Senate Democratic colleagues and the Democratic House will bring equal bipartisanship and equal urgency to this legislation as well.

In closing, I think all of us could take a lesson from our constituents. As we finish negotiating and finalize this bold legislation, we should look to the American people. Everywhere you look these past days, individuals, families, and organizations are stepping up to the plate and finding creative ways to serve those in need.

One of my fellow Kentuckians is a woman named Erin Hinson. Erin lives in Louisville. She is someone whom doctors have told to be particularly careful these past few days, so her opportunities to pitch in were somewhat limited, but she was determined to do her part. Here is what she said: "I may never have the capacity to develop a vaccine or a magic pill to get rid of COVID-19 . . . but I can master a spreadsheet!"

Erin created a website—Louisvillecovid19match.com. There is one signup sheet for neighbors who are older or at heightened risk and another signup sheet for neighbors who are young and healthy. And Erin is performing a kind of matchmaking service. If someone needs a prescription pickup or some groceries delivered or even a friendly phone call, she helps make the connection.

With a little help from local media, Erin is already tracking more than 400 volunteers—400 volunteers—from every Louisville ZIP Code. It is the perfect manifestation of Kentucky's State motto: "United we stand, divided we fall." United we stand—even if we have to stand 6 feet apart for a few weeks—and divided we fall. Brave and generous and creative Americans all across our Nation get it. They just need Congress to get it too.

I am impressed and heartened by the speed and bipartisan spirit that has characterized the past day's discussions, but we need to keep it up. We absolutely cannot let up now. We need to finish these negotiations and move forward.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.