

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to urge the Senate to immediately take action to address the issue of elections and specifically to address technical changes to the \$400 million in election security funding passed in the CARES Act and to talk about the coronavirus threat to our democracy itself.

Sixteen States have already postponed their Presidential primaries or transitioned their primaries to almost entirely voting by mail. We have seen Republican and Democratic Governors across the country, from States like West Virginia, Indiana—the Presiding Officer's State—New York, and Kentucky, issue waivers allowing all voters to cast their ballots by mail during the pandemic. This includes States that used to have requirements that you have to give a reason to even get a mail-in ballot to vote from home. Both Democratic and Republican Governors have waived it—not in every State but in a number of States.

While it is important that individual States are taking action to protect voters during this pandemic, it is the responsibility of us, of Congress, to ensure that States have the funds they need to make our elections more resilient and to make sure voters don't have to risk their health to cast their ballots. We must do this because, as we have seen over the last several weeks, not all States are doing everything they can to protect voters. That is sad, but it is true.

What is coming before us in the fall is a national election. Just yesterday, we learned that the attorney general of Texas has asked the Texas Supreme Court to stop county election officials from letting voters who are afraid of getting the coronavirus to vote by mail. He basically went to court and said that the counties that are giving out these ballots should stop. He tried, he tried, and he is continuing to try to stop them from simply sending out ballots to voters who are afraid to vote in person. Some of them have preexisting conditions. Some of them are veterans who served our country. Some of them are seniors.

Basically, in this one State—by the way, there are other things going on in other States—the attorney general is trying to stop them from actually voting from home. Under Texas law, you have to have an excuse in order to vote by mail.

This pandemic, as we know, has killed more than 85,000 Americans. Local officials in Texas have told the voters that the coronavirus—they have looked at the law and said that it is a valid excuse to request a mail-in ballot. I guess it is. I would think it is. But the Texas attorney general disagrees and has asked the Texas Supreme Court to stop these local election officials from sending voters a mail-in ballot.

That is a disgrace. We shouldn't be playing politics with people's lives.

Even the most cynical Americans believe that. They know people play politics all the time, but they don't think you should play it with their lives.

We know from what happened in Wisconsin that people who show up to vote during this crisis are, in fact, risking their health if precautions are not taken. A little over a month ago, both Democratic and Republican voters and Independent voters in Wisconsin stood for hours in the cold and the rain, wearing garbage bags and homemade masks, in order to cast their votes. There were just 5 polling locations open in Milwaukee instead of the usual 180 and 2 in Green Bay instead of the usual 30, and two-thirds of Wisconsin's African-American voters live in Milwaukee.

There is no question that this vast reduction in polling places, without there being the adequate time to transition to mail-in voting, ended up disenfranchising voters, particularly in the case of African-American voters. At the same time, we saw people trying to vote in whatever way they could. They tried to mail in their ballots even when it was at the last minute.

Now health officials say that more than 67 people in Wisconsin may have become infected with the coronavirus as a result of that election. This is unacceptable. No one should have to choose between exercising the right to vote and protecting the health of themselves and their loved ones. What happened in Wisconsin will be forever etched in the memory of our Nation. We can't allow this to happen again.

In the face of this, yesterday, the Wisconsin Supreme Court actually struck down the Governor's stay-at-home order.

We should actually be taking steps forward now instead of backward. Public health experts have warned of the possibility of another, more serious outbreak of this virus in the fall. Congress must act now to give States the funding they need. We know the States are strapped—that every single State in this country is strapped.

Even if we were to do nothing here, we would know there are going to be States that are going to get humongous requests for mail-in ballots that they have never gotten before. We know that in the State of Wisconsin, Senator JOHNSON's State. It is traditionally a State in which about 6 percent of the people vote by mail. Next-door, in my home State of Minnesota, it is 25 percent. Yes, it is more, but we know it is probably going to at least double—and more—no matter what party you are in.

This is why the Republican Governors are asking for money. They may not agree with everything in my bill, but so many of them are asking for funding to be able to help them send out those ballots and send out the postage so as to keep their polling places open, say, for 1 week, 2 weeks, or, we think, 20 days in advance so that people could actually vote and not con-

gregate in one location. That is why this is happening right now.

Nearly 2 months ago, I introduced legislation, the Natural Disaster and Emergency Ballot Act, with Senator WYDEN, along with 35 of my colleagues. The bill would simply ensure that every voter could cast a ballot by mail, that those who need it could have expanded access to early in-person voting, and that States could have the funding and resources that are necessary to safely administer elections.

This week, the House introduced the COVID 4 bill, the fourth COVID relief package, the HEROES Act. It contains the election reforms found in my legislation as well as \$3.6 billion to help States protect our elections from COVID-19. That is because mailing mail-in ballots all over the country is going to cost some change. We know that. Yet what is the alternative? Is it telling veterans who served on the battlefield in World War II, like the one I heard about yesterday, that they can't vote or that they have to stand in line? What is the alternative—telling seniors they have to stand in line? No, that is not a good alternative. The alternative is to make sure we expand mail-in ballots.

I know negotiations will occur over the coming days regarding the next relief package. I look forward to working with my Democratic and Republican colleagues.

I see the chairman of the Committee on Rules and Administration is here, Senator BLUNT. I look forward to working with him just as we have recently done on remote committee hearings, which have actually, by all accounts, gone pretty well in the Senate over the last few weeks.

I am here today to push for a change that we know needs to be done, and that is to make some changes to make sure the first grouping of money we got—the \$400 million of emergency funding in the first bill—can get out to the States, because of some changes that were made to the original proposal that have made it hard for some of our States to be able to get that money out. There is a matching requirement, and we see it already playing out. Utah and Oklahoma have indicated they will only be able to access a portion of the funding they have been provided because they can't come up with the full matching requirement. Florida has not yet accessed the funds at all because it is working to see if its legislature can accommodate the matched funding.

These are all things we have to work on for this forthcoming legislation, as well as to look at what we did in the first package. There are also issues with the reporting requirements in the bill, but the last thing we want to do is to put an undue burden on the States.

What I really want to focus on now, at the end of my remarks, is the need to pass the legislation in front of us—and I know it will be negotiated—to make sure that we fund and help our

States fund our elections. Let's dispel the notion that voting at home is somehow a partisan issue. One of the States with the highest number of mail-in ballots is the State of Utah. It is not exactly a bright-blue State. Another State that has a very high number of people voting from home is the State of Colorado. This is a State that tends to be a purple State. Then we have blue States, like Oregon and Washington. Then we have a State like Arizona that, again, has a high number of people voting by mail. On the other end are States that don't have as many people voting by mail, but we have a mixture of States too. New York is at like 5 percent right now. Then we have a number of States, like Alabama, that don't have a lot of people voting by mail.

We don't think—at least I don't think—that every single person is going to vote by mail in the election this November. The key is to give them options and to be able to work with our States so that, if we do provide funding—and I am so hopeful that we will be able to come to some kind of agreement here—they can use that money to expand their votes by mail, because we know their citizens are going to request it, and also to make sure voting on election day will be safe. There are ways to do that by encouraging more people, if they don't want to vote by mail, to vote early so fewer people will be there on the same day.

What do we see when we look at this? A recent poll shows that in some of the key States across the country, both Republican and Democratic voters—70 to 80 percent of them—want to be able to vote by mail. We have Governors in States like New Hampshire—Republican Governors—in Maryland, and in Ohio who want to vote by mail. That is the way they want to go. We have a secretary of state who is a Republican in the State of Washington who wants to vote by mail. Her entire State basically votes by mail right now, and they are good people who can talk about why this is working for them and how we can make it work but only if they have the funds. We are not going to be able to give them the funds in, say, October and then be able to make sure this has happened.

In conclusion, 17 States still have Presidential primaries, and numerous others have primaries for other Federal offices, and, of course, we have the general election on November 3, which is less than 6 months away. We cannot let more Americans experience what we have just seen happen in Wisconsin with the garbage bags, with the homemade masks, with the people getting off work at the hospitals and standing in line. Nobody should have to choose between one's health and one's right to vote.

I am committed to securing additional funding in the upcoming relief package, but we have fixes that we must make to the original funding that we made in the first bill, in the first

piece of legislation, and we need to get that money out to our election officials today.

For these reasons, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of a bill at the desk to modify the provisions on funding for election security grants. I further ask that the bill be considered read three times and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, there are many things that the Senator from Minnesota spoke to that I think most of us would agree with.

This COVID crisis has created all kinds of issues that need to be thoroughly discussed and thoroughly debated. I think there are a number of us on this side of the aisle—I am just one standing up—who object to this unanimous consent request. The good news for the Senator from Minnesota is, in talking with those colleagues, they also agree there is a fair number of elements in this bill with which they could probably find agreement.

I rise to certainly extend my hand in cooperation with the Senator from Minnesota. Let's work on these things together, although this is not a bill that comes through my committee's jurisdiction. I can say, in my committee, we work across the aisle. Staff does an awful lot of work, and we come to a conclusion. If it is not ready for a particular markup, we go back and get the work done. We frequently pass a piece of legislation by voice vote and then bring it to the floor when it has all been ironed out. There is no disagreement, and there is no objection, and we pass those bills by unanimous consent.

I think the problem here is that this bill has never had any kind of committee markup or any committee work whatsoever. So I would just suggest that the Senator from Minnesota work with her committee and her committee chair. I see the committee chair is here in the Chamber. Work on this. Try to find those areas of agreement. Then maybe we could pass this and maybe potentially pass this by unanimous consent. This piece of legislation is not ready. It hasn't gone through that process. As a result, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I appreciate my colleague's words in that he is willing to work with me on this bill.

We know we need the immediate fixes to the first piece of legislation, but we also need to look forward to what we have in front of us. That is to make sure that we help our States to be able to conduct their elections in a safe way so that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents—anyone who

wants to vote, whatever party one is in—is able to safely vote.

Let's remember that, while people were lining those streets to vote in Wisconsin, the President of the United States was able to request a mail-in ballot from Palm Beach, FL, and vote in the comfort of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. That is an image—a split screen—that I don't think anyone wants to see. I think what we want to see is fairness for all Americans. You do that by getting them the funding ahead of time, by making sure we have rules in place that work for everyone, by acknowledging this has never been nor should it be a partisan issue, and by telling all Americans that we have worked this out, that we are getting the funding to the States, that we are working with all of their States, and that we have put in some fair rules so that no American will be denied the right to vote.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, this is National Police Week. It is one of the weeks that I always look forward to.

For years now, it has been an opportunity to spend time with people who protect us—who protect all of us. We get a chance each day to say thank you to the Capitol Police, who work here at the Capitol. As the chairman of the Law Enforcement Caucus, I have lots of opportunities in our State to see officers in groups and one at a time, and I always try to be thankful to them when I see them. Yet this is a time every year when we get a chance to see people from all over the country come to Washington, and it is a chance for us to say thank you to them and thank you to their families.

This year in particular, Chief Jon Belmar—the just recently retiring chief at the St. Louis County Police Department and good friend who was always there for advice, always brought a big contingent of officers to Police Week. So I am thinking about him and of not seeing him at Police Week in Washington.

I am also thinking about the new chief of the St. Louis County Police Department, Chief Mary Barton. This is a county of over a million people, so it is a substantial job. It is a place to really affect how police work is done. I look forward to spending time with Chief Barton as she moves forward with what she can do to build on what has happened in the department over the years.

Like so much else this year, Police Week is different than it has been before. There are no sounds of hundreds of motorcycles going down the streets of Washington as we celebrate the week. There are no groups of law enforcement officers or police vehicles from all over the country coming here. I am grateful for them. They protect