

Vladimir Putin a few times in the past, and I said “Russia” when I meant “Vladimir Putin.”

I think the American people stand interested not just in the future of the Chinese people but also of the Russian people, and both these countries are led by some really bad actors.

One time I made a speech here on the floor about some of the terrible things Vladimir Putin was doing to oppress his people and to meddle in our election and other elections.

After the speech, which I thought covered the points I needed to cover, Gary Kasparov, the former world chess champion, came and said: Can I talk to you?

We went to lunch, and he said: If you actually want to fight against Vladimir Putin—because freedom-loving people in the United States and in Russia should be opposed to Vladimir Putin—it would be helpful that you not, in disparaging Vladimir Putin, say a whole bunch of bad stuff about the word “Russia” and you accidentally—he said to me—referred to our problem as “Russia” when you meant “Putin.”

I think I have learned that lesson with regard to Russia, but I think a lot of us around here don’t always sufficiently distinguish between China and the Chinese Communist Party.

So I just wanted to affirm and underscore your message—not just good legislation that is good for Americans, is good for investors in the United States and abroad, is good for a level playing field, but as we oppose the bad actions of the Chinese Communist Party—their intellectual property theft and their manipulation of currency and numbers and public health data and on and on and on—our opponent is not the Chinese people, and we should say that both so the American people understand it and so that the Chinese people understand it. So I commend you on the way you introduced your legislation today.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MCSALLY). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I rise today to engage in a colloquy with Senators CASSIDY, COLLINS, and my fellow Senator from New Jersey, Senator BOOKER, and I ask unanimous consent that they be acknowledged in that order and that they be allowed to complete their remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SMART ACT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, as our Nation grapples with the COVID-19 pandemic, our State, county, and municipal governments have been on the frontlines taking a leading role in responding to this crisis. As a result,

they have been squeezed on both sides of the ledger, spending billions of dollars in unforeseen costs on emergency response while watching as revenues dry up due to necessary stay-at-home orders and the closure of non-essential businesses.

The emergency protective measures have been effective at flattening the curve and have no doubt saved thousands of lives, but they also came with a cost. All revenue sources are down. Sales tax revenue has plummeted with businesses closed. Highway trust funds won’t have the resources to do basic road maintenance. Downtown parking meters are going empty due to people observing social distancing. Building permits and municipal court fees have fallen.

Unless we act soon, we will see mass layoffs, devastating tax increases, and a breakdown in public safety and essential services. Already, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that State and local governments laid off 1 million public employees in April. This challenge is true for every State, county, city, and town in the country.

The State Municipal Assistance for Response and Transition, or SMART Act, is the bold, bipartisan, and commonsense solution we need to give our communities a fighting chance and stop the economy from free-falling. It provides \$500 billion in flexible Federal dollars that will help our communities dramatically expand the testing capacity and contact tracing we need to contain the virus—a necessary step in restoring consumer confidence and to restart the economy. It will help stave off massive layoffs, tax hikes, and deep, painful cuts to essential services. It will keep our police officers, firefighters, public health workers, teachers, and other essential employees on the job during this critical time, because it is not just about defeating COVID-19; we still need to keep our streets safe, our children learning, the trash picked up, the roads maintained, and the buses and trains running on time.

I hear some of my colleagues speak from this floor, calling not for unity but for division. They callously ignore the pleas for help from their fellow Americans, comforted by the selfish but mistaken belief that their communities are immune to the fiscal Armageddon facing our communities. Let me be clear. When your revenues drop 30 percent overnight, it really doesn’t matter how fiscally responsible or conservative your State budget is; no one can prepare for that.

Moody’s just reported that States like Ohio and Arizona are facing the fiscal shock of losing 20 percent of their entire budget, and West Virginia, 40 percent. This is not a red State or blue State issue; this is a red, white, and blue issue. It is an American priority.

In December of 1862, during the height of the Civil War, President Lincoln wrote the following message to

Congress: “In times like the present, men should utter nothing for which they would not willingly be responsible through time and eternity.”

I believe that history will look kindly upon those who stood for unity and compromise over demagoguery, those who put the well-being of the country over scoring partisan points, those who stuck out their necks and took a political risk for no other reason than it was the right thing to do.

I am proud of the bipartisan coalition we have built, and I want to thank each of my colleagues for their work and their commitment to rebuilding our communities—Senator CASSIDY, who has led this effort with me, Senator HYDE-SMITH; Senator MANCHIN, Senator COLLINS, and my partner in New Jersey, Senator BOOKER.

With that, I turn to my friend from Louisiana, the distinguished Senator who exemplifies these qualities and has been an incredible partner in crafting this legislation and building this coalition over the past month.

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, I thank Senator MENENDEZ and return the compliment. We have worked through a lot of issues to find a bill that meets a valid, public purpose that can pass on a bipartisan basis in both Chambers. I thank Senator MENENDEZ for working with me on that.

The title of this bill is the “SMART Act,” but in retrospect, I wish we had renamed it “the Thin Blue Line Act” because this is about helping cities and States preserve essential services such as police, fire, and education for the re-opening of our economy.

Let’s just kind of review. The Federal Government asked that State and local governments shut down their economy in order to control the coronavirus, and just like those small businesses closed at the behest of the government authority, so did State and local governments close, if you will, at the behest of the Federal authority. But what that did is it devastated the tax basis.

Moody’s, which Senator MENENDEZ already alluded to, the independent agency that looks at the finances of cities and States, has said that if your State is dependent upon income tax, upon sales tax, upon tourism, and upon proceeds from energy, you have been hammered. Your tax base has fallen dramatically, and with the dramatic fall of that tax base comes a dramatic fall in the ability to support the thin blue line—the educators, the firefighters, the you name it, the essential services that are essential to the re-opening of our economy when we come out the backside of this epidemic.

Now, it has already happened. Moody’s predicts that 3 million of these essential workers will be laid off. I am told that 1 million already have been. You can read about universities laying people off, but let’s go back to the thin blue line.

The city of Shreveport, LA, just put out a budget in which there is a \$20

million hit to their city budget overall, and \$3.9 million was, unfortunately, laid upon law enforcement and 54 positions eliminated.

Now, I am told that some Federal dollars came through and allowed the restoration of some of those positions, which, if you will, is a proof in concept that if there is help from the Federal taxpayer to the State and local taxpayer—because they are one in the same—then, these essential services can be preserved. And we know that if those police positions are preserved, then, that downtown in Shreveport is more likely to safely reopen for commerce.

Now, we talked about Moody's predicting loss of revenue. Louisiana is predicted to lose 45 percent of its revenue, but there are other States affected. New Jersey, Maine, Florida, Oklahoma, Michigan, Idaho, Alaska, Arizona, and Illinois are all predicted to lose large sums of tax revenue.

So let me speak specifically about the SMART Act, or, again, as I call it, the "Thin Blue Line" bill. It is a reasonable, bipartisan, "this is how we go forward" bill in both Chambers. We picked \$500 billion. Some would say: Well, that is too much. Actually, that was the amount of money that Moody's predicts State and local governments will lack over the next year and a half. So we actually kind of nail where the independent agency puts the need for our State and our local government, and it is targeted.

One, there has been a lot of concern that this would be used to "bail out States," that those who have accumulated a large, unfunded accrued liability in their pension funds would use that money to support those pension funds. We specifically do not allow that. So if that is somebody's political concern, that has been addressed.

What do we do? Well, first, a third of the dollars can go out now because it is based upon population. This recognizes that if California has 31 million people and Wyoming has 500,000, there needs to be some accommodation for just the population size because, inevitably, that is going to influence the total need.

The next third will go out at the end of June, based upon how hard a State was hit in terms of health from the coronavirus. So if your State was slammed from coronavirus—Louisiana was, New Jersey was, and other States have been—then, that is where you get the help.

Frankly, it is unfortunate that you are getting the help. It would be a lot better if your State had not been impacted, but if it has been impacted, it is there to support your State through the health aspect of this crisis.

The last third will go out at end of this calendar year. That is based upon the financial hit that your State has taken. So if your State's tax base has been decreased by 45 percent, then, you would get additional dollars in the third tranche of money, which comes

out at the end of the calendar year. Obviously, at the end of this calendar year is almost beyond the fiscal year for most States, and so that would place the dollars at the State's disposal for the next fiscal year. In that way, we cover this prolonged period that Moody's says that State and local governments will be out.

There is one more concern, and that is whether or not all this money will go to a Governor's office and none will go to counties or parishes or municipalities in Louisiana. One-third of the dollars will go directly to municipalities and counties—those local governments that are on the forefront of providing services to those who are being affected by the coronavirus epidemic.

We think we have something which balances the needs of stakeholders—the most important stakeholder being the American citizen—that both addresses the need for fiscal accountability and the need to preserve those essential government services to get our economy going once more.

Again, I am going to ask all of my colleagues to support the "Thin Blue Line" bill, otherwise known as the SMART Act. I think it is a smart way to go forward to make sure we don't slip into a recession, but we return with as robust an economy from this crisis as when we entered the crisis.

With that, I will yield to my colleague from Maine.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, I am pleased to be a cosponsor of the SMART Act, and I want to commend Senator MENENDEZ and Senator CASSIDY for their tremendous leadership. Our bill would help offset the collapse of State and local revenues resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus has already claimed the lives of more than 90,000 Americans. As the virus damages our health and deprives us of our loved ones, it has also devastated our communities and our economy.

As of last week, nearly 20 percent of Maine's total civilian workforce had filed for unemployment. The tourism sector has been particularly hard hit, and this is so important to my State. But the fact is that no industrial sector has been immune from this disease.

Restaurants and hotels in southern Maine face uncertainty, not knowing when or even if they will ever reopen. As a result of having to cancel non-essential surgeries, many hospitals are struggling to stay open. Lobstermen and fishermen have lost major markets. Potato farmers may be unable to sell more than \$22 million worth of their 2019 crop. The motor coach industry has been devastated. In short, working families and communities across the State of Maine have been hit hard.

Moody's forecasts that Maine may face one of the worst impacts in the entire country in terms of lost revenues. Eighty-five percent of Maine's State

revenues are from income and sales taxes. They have plummeted. Gas tax revenues have tanked. These projected shortfalls threaten vital State and local services.

One in six Mainers is employed in the public sector. These are the individuals who keep our communities and our citizens safe: the police officers, the firefighters, the EMS personnel. They provide healthcare and education. They maintain our roads and our bridges.

When I visited the Orono Fire Department recently to deliver some much needed masks, the town manager told me that the decline in excise taxes has been devastating for this town.

Maine communities tell me that they will have no choice but to either increase property taxes, at the worst possible time for working families, or eliminate first responder jobs and slash education funding if they do not receive help.

The SMART Act would help to avoid the worst of these consequences by providing \$500 billion in Federal relief to State, local, and Tribal governments. Unlike the CARES Act, where only big cities were eligible for assistance, under our bill every county and every community would be eligible for funding. Maine would receive at least \$2 billion, including about \$330 million for counties and \$330 million for communities. And the \$1.25 billion that we already appropriated for assistance to State governments under the CARES Act would be made much more flexible so it could be used to offset these dramatic revenue shortfalls.

The fallout from the coronavirus is unprecedented. Congress has a tremendous responsibility to help mitigate the impact of this crisis on our States and our local communities and on the families they serve. We must not wait. We should act now.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Madam President, I thank Senators CASSIDY and MENENDEZ for leading on this extraordinary bill and the broad bipartisan support that it has.

I know Senator MENENDEZ and I have both been mayors in our communities, and when there is no crisis, we know intimately the challenges that so many of our public servants face. In times when we do not see pandemics, our firefighters put their lives on the line, our police officers put their lives on the line, and our teachers extraordinarily work above and beyond the call of duty. Indeed, our communities are strong because of these dedicated public workers.

At a time of crisis, we see that our teachers are rising to the challenge, working to keep their students engaged, even though they are now miles apart. I hear stories of teachers riding around, going out to visit students, keeping their distance but ensuring that the students get the support they need.

Our firefighters are out there now, putting their lives even more at a risk, putting themselves on the line to help their communities.

Police officers are answering calls without hesitation, despite the great risk that puts on them and their families when they go home.

So many of our other public servants are working diligently to keep our communities running, to keep our States strong to meet a crisis, and to try to help folks stay healthy and stay safe. Without hesitation, across New Jersey—across all of our 50 States—we are seeing more clearly the heroic actions of people who are leading in a time of crisis.

But as was said by my colleagues, across the country, States are being hit by significantly declining revenues and extraordinarily increasing costs. We are already seeing early projections, as discussed by my colleagues. Even independent rating agencies like Moody's are talking about hundreds of billions of dollars in deficits for our State and local governments.

My own Governor has estimated New Jersey's protracted gap caused by those declining revenues—those extremely rising costs—to be somewhere between \$20 and \$30 billion.

Due to these shortfalls, without immediate action from Congress, State and local governments will be forced to make deep cuts to public services, including laying off folks who are not just essential in word but who often make the difference between life and death, safety or crisis in our communities. These would be the workers who would be laid off at a time when we need them the most.

Not only do we need these vital public servants on the job, protecting our communities, educating our kids, and supporting our neighbors, but cuts like these actually will aggravate and deepen the overall economic crisis facing our country. Independent rating agencies and others say that cuts like these will actually prolong our economic crisis and the time needed for recovery. This is not the time for half measures. This is the time to act at the scale that the crisis demands.

The Federal Government needs to be providing a robust, accurately tailored response to this crisis by funding our State and local governments in a way that prioritizes those areas that have been hit the hardest. The SMART Act does exactly that. It is a bipartisan bill. It is thoughtful. It is tailored narrowly to fit this crisis.

The SMART Act is a commonsense approach that will make sure that the help is going to where it is needed most—to our hardest hit communities and States—and to help ensure that those workers whom we hail with our words—firefighters, police officers, and teachers—we support with our actions, as well, for they are out there right now supporting us.

No State should go bankrupt fighting this virus, because of this virus. No

State should go bankrupt because we in the Federal Government refuse to support them. No essential public worker should lose their job because of this crisis and because Congress was not stepping up to lead through it.

There is no time to waste. As was said by my colleague, we have folks in my State who are putting together their budgets right now. As we heard from my colleague from Louisiana, they are already accounting for the need to make cuts. We have already seen hundreds of thousands of public workers being laid off. The delay has costs, and when you are talking about first responders, the delays can have costs that are hard to imagine.

I encourage my colleagues to see this as what it is. It is an accurately tailored response. It is a bipartisan bill. It is what our Nation needs right now. I encourage my colleagues in the Senate to work to get this to the floor so that we can vote on it, pass it, and get it through Congress to the President's desk, so we can avoid the storm that we are in and, ultimately, overcome the severity of its ravages.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mrs. LOEFFLER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks before the 12:30 p.m. vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### U.S.A. RISE

Mrs. LOEFFLER. Madam President, 8 weeks ago today, the Senate passed the CARES Act, an unprecedented \$2.2 trillion package of legislation aimed at providing relief as our country took steps to respond to the threat of COVID-19.

Previously, we passed legislation to expand free access to testing and paid leave, accelerate vaccines and treatments, and to support the Federal agencies leading our pandemic response.

The CARES Act was designed to support the health of our citizens and the economy. It included direct payments to American families, grants to hospitals, and the Paycheck Protection Program—forgivable loans to small businesses to keep their employees on the payroll. The program was so successful that a month later, Congress approved the additional \$310 billion for PPP loans, \$75 billion for hospitals, and \$25 billion for testing.

Georgia hospitals have received over \$1.7 billion, including at least \$328 million for our rural businesses under the CARES Act.

I worked to include provisions in the CARES Act to expand rural health and telehealth program. Our State has received more than \$800,000 from these programs. They are helping Georgians across our State stay connected with their doctors from the safety of their own homes.

In addition, our State and local governments have received \$5.8 billion to help schools adjust to online learning, to provide assistance for those who lost

their jobs or homes, to keep our airports running, and to help our communities respond and serve in this challenging moment.

The action Congress took has helped to meet immediate challenges, but it is clear the pandemic has caused significant human suffering and staggering economic losses.

In the last 2 months, I have heard from hundreds suffering the effects of this outbreak and the response: first responders, doctors, and nurses on the frontline, small business owners and farmers who have seen the viability of their businesses threatened, families who have suffered job losses, children who are out of school, and food banks that have seen an unprecedented surge in demand.

Before this pandemic, Americans were enjoying a thriving economy, with the lowest unemployment rate in 50 years. Under the leadership of the Trump administration, more families were on their way to living the American dream. Then, in late March, the day after the Senate passed the CARES Act, we learned that a record 3.3 million workers had applied for initial unemployment benefits in a single week. The total is now a staggering 36.5 million Americans who filed initial jobless claims. This is more than the combined populations of Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

In my State, more than one in three Georgians have lost their jobs. Watching this unfold, despite the relief of the CARES Act, I recognize that it is time to look beyond the immediate response and to focus on our recovery. As a member of the President's Opening Up America Again Congressional Group, I am putting my nearly three decades of experience in building companies and creating jobs and opportunities to work for Georgians. With my experience and the conversations I have had with Georgians, I developed a U.S.A. Restoring and Igniting the Strength of Our Economy plan—or U.S.A. Rise—to bring back our thriving economy. The four pillars of the plan are Made in the U.S.A., Grown in the U.S.A., Hiring in the U.S.A., and Families in the U.S.A. I started to introduce legislative proposals based on this four-pillar framework that incentivize companies to invest in America, to grow jobs, and to help families.

I would like to highlight one of those pillars today, Families in the U.S.A.

First, we mourn the loss of those to COVID-19. The toll of this has devastated thousands of families. It is also clear that with economic damage comes societal damage. Our country needed to take dramatic actions to flatten the curve, but those steps meant most Americans were confined to their homes. This meant work from home, school from home, but also, in too many instances, lost jobs, isolation, depression, suicide, and domestic, substance, and child abuse.

It is timely that May is Mental Health Awareness Month. In a recent