

degenerated into a free-for-all, the crowd growing restive, pushing and shoving to get the limited supply of appointment tickets. Jolley moved to the front of the line, trying to protect his new friend, La, by reaching down and plucking two tickets—No. 69 for her and No. 64 for him.

Others were not so lucky. The numbers quickly ran out, and people were told they had to return the following day. Eventually, staffers referred people to the three new events added for the coming week because of the demand.

Ashley Love, 31, a former customer advocate for Enterprise Rent-A-Car, had risen at 4 a.m. to take her 2-year-old daughter to her mother's home before heading to the convention center, only to be told she had to come back the next day. She was laid off in March, when the pandemic nearly obliterated the travel industry. Her benefits inexplicably stopped four weeks ago, the agency website saying only she was on a "verification hold."

"It's appalling, I don't understand how they can do this to people," Love said. "One day, I called 15 times in two hours, and they either don't answer or take your calls and hang up on you."

Love was getting down to the last she has, having run through \$4,000 in savings. Even before her benefits froze, she was getting only about \$137 a week, plus \$600 a week from the federal government's pandemic emergency assistance program, due to expire around the end of the month. Her regular monthly bills—rent, car payment, insurance—are \$2,091.

She has continued her search for a job, even contemplating whether she should "Find Something New"—as the White House's new ad campaign suggests—researching how she could get certification to start a career in teaching.

Shelley Zumwalt, the interim director of Oklahoma's unemployment agency, said the state's system uses a mainframe computer from 1978 that was quickly overwhelmed by the volume of claims. "My first day, I sat down with one of the claims agents and said, 'Show me what you do,' and a green screen popped up and she pushed F9," Zumwalt said. "That was the clearest thing to me that I was dealing with a technology that was older than I am."

She launched the series of more than a dozen mega-events July 1 after several days in June when desperate people began showing up to the OESC office in Oklahoma City and waiting in line with coolers, camp chairs and tents.

"I'm not okay with people having to camp out to get their claims processed," Zumwalt said.

Some who showed up at the event had received notes from the OESC that they had been approved for unemployment benefits when they hadn't yet applied, convinced they had been victims of fraud. Zumwalt said that about 90,000 claims have been flagged as fraudulent.

Last month, the U.S. Labor Department's Office of Inspector General, working with the OESC, said it had stopped payment on 3,800 unemployment insurance claims, including 1,300 filed from IP addresses in London, saving the state nearly \$16 million.

Many real Oklahomans in need of assistance are suffering through the complicated unemployment process, too. The state has rejected more than half of the unemployment claims filed through June 21, some for gig or self-employed workers who must be denied regular unemployment insurance before they can qualify for the federal government's Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, Zumwalt said.

Many who showed up at the Tulsa convention center were navigating government as-

sistance for the first time, such as Sarah Miller, 29, a single mother of three who was told not to come back to her job as a nursing home aide after she experienced symptoms consistent with covid-19 in March. Her unemployment claim has been pending since April 12.

"I need this. I need it," she said. "I've never been one to do unemployment, but with all that's going on, I don't really have any other option. I have to be home with my kids; I can't afford to pay a babysitter or do day care. Got to do what I got to do."

"WE'RE ALL GLITCHES"

Jolley had time to go home before his 6:30 a.m. appointment, shower and change into cargo shorts and a shirt printed with tiny steaks and barbecues. He was among the first into the cavernous Expo center, where claims seekers sat down in folding chairs six feet apart.

Staffers handed out bottles of water, Kind granola bars and a flier that advertised drive-up distribution at the local food pantry, "Soup's On at the Community Kitchen." Jolley tucked the flier along with other documents in a blue folder he labeled "Unemployment."

As he waited for his name and number to be called, Jolley looked around at the others sitting in their socially distanced chairs and was reminded of the animated Disney movie "Wreck-It Ralph," which he watches with his 7-year-old, Pearl. In it, Ralph is a lumbering video game villain who hopes to restart his life by helping a video game princess stuck in a computer glitch.

In a way, everyone in this room is a glitch, he said, just like Princess Vanellope in the movie.

"People that are here, we're all glitches," he said. "We fell through the cracks. The computer system didn't work for us."

Jolley has a degree in petroleum engineering but started Big Guys Inc. advertising in 1995 as a hedge against the ups and downs of the oil market. For a long time, the company provided a good living, even during the 2008 recession. He sells ad space for mom-and-pop businesses—tree trimmers, DUI lawyers—posted in bathrooms in airports, restaurants and concert venues.

"It's a captive audience with disposable income," he quipped, that old joke. "Or it was before this."

He had always thought he would do this until he retired, especially after life dealt him the surprise of Pearl and he became a single dad at 50. Now, he was just hoping his misfortune would be temporary, that business would revive as things normalized, with concerts and other events supposed to restart in Oklahoma in August.

When his name was called, he went behind black curtains where claims agents were working on their ancient computer program. He gave a written summary of his many contacts with the agency to Ashley Testerman, an agent in a black cotton mask.

"I brought a cheat sheet," he said.

"You have no payments; let's see if you are in the system," she said.

In the end, after all that—the numerous phone calls, the hours wasted on hold, the evening spent sleeping in his car—all he needed was a working PIN number, and Jolley was able to file claims for all the weeks he had missed since April.

"I feel so relieved," he said afterward, joking that he might do a Jed Clampett-like jig in the parking lot on his way out the door. But the joy would be temporary. His last sobering exchange with the claims agent stuck in his mind.

"We don't know what the future holds," he had said. "What happens if everything shuts down again?"

What then?

Mr. WYDEN. I close by way of saying that I came to the floor some time ago to ask unanimous consent to make sure that this weekend, when millions of people are hurting—remember, the suffering starts in 2 days. It starts on Saturday—2 days in Florida, in Oregon, in Wyoming, and all over the country. MITCH MCCONNELL's response was: Let's take a break; we can take off. He didn't seem to see those hurting people in Kentucky. Maybe they will have something to say to him this weekend.

I will tell you, I think it is a big mistake for Senate Republicans to have frittered away weeks on end, when we could have had a dialogue and we could have talked about ideas.

The Presiding Officer has talked to me a number of times since he has been here about healthcare. I enjoy talking to my colleagues and working on ideas to try to find a way to address concerns and solve problems. There wasn't one single effort—not one—to pick up on any of the ideas that I have been discussing here. In fact, I tried to reach out to colleagues on the other side and told them that I heard them say repeatedly that benefits should taper down as the unemployment rate goes down. Well, that is the heart of our bill on this side.

The hurt and pain that working families are going to face this Saturday and Sunday—2 days from now—did not have to happen. It didn't have to happen. Our side has a bill to work on. The other side, I gather, has some ideas. We have not seen a single piece of paper, but I know that all those people who are hurting can't eat retroactively. They can't eat all the Republican theories about delay and haggling.

I believe these working families deserve a whole lot better. They deserve some predictability and certainty that when they are hurting—through no fault of their own—their government isn't going to turn its back on them and say: We don't care if your kids can't eat and you don't have a roof over your head. Our country has always been better than that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

CARES 2

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I said on Tuesday, our Nation stands at a critical midway point in our fight against the coronavirus. We made it through the springtime lockdowns. Americans' sacrifices saved our medical system. The Senate's historic CARES Act helped millions of families make it through, but this terrible virus is still with us. It kills more Americans every day. Some areas that have reopened have seen cases spike. Our hospitals, healthcare providers, and especially our vulnerable citizens are nowhere near out of the woods.

Meanwhile, although the early days of our economic recovery have beaten expectations and surprised the experts, we have really only begun to repair the

damage. More than 17 million Americans are still jobless. Far too many families are still hurting. This is not over. America's fight continues, so Congress's support for our people must continue as well.

The Senate majority has assembled a framework for CARES 2. The administration has requested additional time to review the fine details, but we will be laying down this proposal early next week. We have an agreement in principle on the shape of the package. It is the framework that will enable Congress to make law and deliver more relief to the American people that is tailored precisely to this phase of the crisis.

Chairmen GRASSLEY, ALEXANDER, COLLINS, RUBIO, SHELBY, and BLUNT, and Senators CORNYN and ROMNEY have each spearheaded a part of CARES 2. On Monday, these committee chairmen and Republican Members will introduce each component. The sum of these efforts will be a strong, targeted piece of legislation aimed directly at the challenges we face right now.

Our country is in a middle ground between the strict lockdowns of a few months ago and the future day when a vaccine will put all of this, finally, behind us. Our project now is to build a middle ground that is smart and safe but more sustainable.

We are still waging a healthcare war against the virus, and we cannot let up on that. We need to continue to strengthen the defenses we have built—encouraging mask-wearing, supporting testing, and racing toward treatments and vaccines.

At the same time, the greatest country in world history also needs to get back on offense. We need to carefully but proactively step back toward normalcy. This disease has already stolen the lives of more than 140,000 Americans. It has stolen a half a year of our national life. We cannot let the robbery continue without a fight. We cannot let this pandemic rob us indefinitely of our children's educations and the livelihoods of 17 million American workers.

We need to get Americans back to work and school while continuing to fight for our Nation's health. That is what CARES 2 is designed to do. Our proposal will not waste the American people's time with go-nowhere socialist fantasies. We aren't choreographing political stunts or teeing up the same old partisan trench warfare. Our proposal will focus on three things: kids, jobs, and healthcare.

No. 1, kids. A functioning society needs to educate its children and young adults. Our kids need us to invest in their futures, and working parents need some certainty. We need as many K-12 schools, colleges, and universities as possible to be safely welcoming students this fall.

Chairman ALEXANDER, Chairman SHELBY, and Chairman BLUNT are finalizing an ambitious package of funding and policy to help our schools reopen. They will lay out a reopening-related

funding package for schools and universities north of \$100 billion. That is more money than the House Democrats proposed for a similar fund.

There will be several important policies to help childcare providers, to grant new flexibility to elementary and secondary schools, and more.

No. 2, jobs and the economy. Two provisions of the CARES Act worked especially well to help households stay afloat and help as many workers as possible stay employed.

As Chairman GRASSLEY will explain, Republicans want to send a second round of direct payments to American households, and Senator COLLINS and Senator RUBIO have crafted a sequel to their historic and incredibly successful Paycheck Protection Program. It would give the hardest hit small businesses an opportunity to receive second loans if they continue to pay their workers.

We also intend to continue some temporary Federal supplement to unemployment insurance while fixing the obvious craziness of paying people more to remain out of the workforce. Small business owners across the country have explained how this dynamic is slowing rehiring and recovery. So we are going to provide help but make sure it is suited to reopening the economy.

But temporary relief cannot be our endgame. Americans do not just want to scrape by; they want to thrive again. They want a road back to the incredible job market we had just a few months ago. So Chairman GRASSLEY will also lay out bold policies to incentivize retention, encourage the rehiring of laid-off Americans, and help businesses obtain PPE, testing, and supplies to protect their employees and entice customers.

Think of it this way: In the spring, our economy needed life support. Today, while continuing to support families, we must also get the economy into physical therapy so it can actually regain its strength.

Finally, in looking to the long term, the COVID-19 crisis has weakened the critical Federal trust funds that Americans rely on. As Senator ROMNEY will explain, our proposal includes a bipartisan bill, cosponsored by Senate Democrats, to help a future Congress evaluate bipartisan proposals for protecting and strengthening the programs that Americans count on.

Now, our third pillar is the most important of all—healthcare. Our entire reopening and recovery depend on knocking this awful virus onto its heels.

So as Chairmen ALEXANDER, BLUNT, GRASSLEY, and SHELBY will explain, CARES 2 will continue to treat the root causes of this medical crisis: more resources for hospitals and healthcare workers; more help to keep sprinting toward diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines; new policies to shield seniors from a spike in Medicare premiums; and new legislation that will leave us

with better surge capacity to produce medical countermeasures right here at home the next time a crisis strikes.

There is one more essential element that ties schools, jobs, and healthcare all together—legal protections to prevent our historic recovery efforts from simply lining the pockets of trial lawyers.

We will preserve accountability in cases of actual gross negligence or intentional misconduct, but we are going to make sure that nurses and doctors who fought an unknown enemy are not swamped by a tidal wave of malpractice suits. And we will make sure that school districts, colleges, churches, nonprofits, and employers that obey official guidance do not have to delay reopening because they are afraid they will spend 10 years in court.

So this is where Senate Republicans are focused—more support for healthcare, more direct help for American families, and strong policies to help our country pivot into a safe reopening. We will propose to continue and renew some of the most successful CARES Act policies, while adding bold new ideas to help get schools and jobs open for the American people. This is the package our country needs. This is what we will introduce.

We are repeating the successful strategy that produced the historic, bipartisan CARES Act back in March. First, I asked a number of Republicans to spearhead a serious first draft. Then we put those elements together and invited our Democratic colleagues to the table. And guided by our roadmap, working with the administration, the Senate reached a bipartisan outcome.

Earlier this week, even Speaker PELOSI and Leader SCHUMER seemed to concede that things go better when Republicans lead. They themselves said the real work on this next bill would only begin after Republicans laid out the framework.

Well, I am glad my Democratic friends see things the same way I do. I just hope they meet our serious, fact-based proposal with the productive and bipartisan spirit that got us the CARES Act, rather than the cynical partisanship that led them to block police reform just last month.

Doctors and nurses will need Democrats to come to the table. Unemployed Americans will need Democrats to come to the table. Working parents and school children will need Democrats to come to the table.

We have known all along the American people would defeat this virus by understanding that we are all in this together—every single one of us.

If we want to deliver more historic relief, the Senate will need to remember the very same thing.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the postcloture time on the Hardy nomination be considered expired and the confirmation vote on that nomination occur at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, July 27.