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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, we trust You for protection and peace, for You have promised to guide us by Your grace. May we place our hope in You and never forget how You have sustained us in the past.

Lord, give our Senators the wisdom to do what is best for America. Continue to rule from Heaven so that Your purposes will prevail on Earth.

Hear the cries of the helpless and do for them through our lawmakers what they can't do for themselves. Bring justice and righteousness to our Nation and world as You transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

We pray in Your sacred Name.
Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, there has been a lot of focus lately on the drama here in Washington. For weeks now, as leading Democrats blocked more pandemic relief over unrelated liberal demands, the press has covered their stonewalling like any ordinary political standoff. Who talked

to whom? Who said what in which meeting? What new metaphor did Speaker PELOSI use today to explain that she was blocking progress? But it does the Nation a disservice to act like the last several weeks were just another routine political standoff. It does struggling families and laid-off workers and stressed-out school principals and healthcare professionals a disservice to act like this has just been more Washington gridlock.

The New York Times proclaimed a few days ago that “[Speaker] PELOSI is playing hardball on coronavirus relief.” Well, that is one way to put it. You could say it is “playing hardball” to refuse any outcome for the country. You could say it is “playing hardball” to insist on non-COVID-related liberal policy changes that the Speaker and the Democratic leader know would never pass the Senate or be signed into law by the President.

But if Democrats are “playing hardball,” their opponents aren't us Republicans—not really.

They are playing hardball against kids, workers, and vulnerable Americans who need help.

They are playing hardball against our medical system when the Speaker and the Democratic leader say they won't allow another dime for testing, treatments, or vaccines unless they can bring home a massive tax cut for millionaires in San Francisco and New York City.

They are playing hardball against our Nation's ability to detect and fight the virus.

They are playing hardball against science when the Speaker and the Democratic leader say they will not allow another cent for schools to reopen or for the job-saving PPP unless they get \$1 trillion for a State and local slush fund that is completely out of proportion to actual needs.

They are playing hardball against children and parents when the Speaker and the Democratic leader say they

will not allow any resolution on any issue unless Democrats can pay people more not to work.

They are playing hardball against millions of households that ought to get another stimulus check and against the ability of jobless people to get any Federal benefit whatsoever.

There are life-and-death matters at stake, but Democrats have treated this historic national crisis as a political game. Just look at the redlines the Democratic leaders have drawn around these negotiations. Imagine sitting down with a working family at their kitchen table and explaining that these are the kinds of issues over which the Speaker and the Democratic leader are refusing—refusing—to let them have relief.

First, as I mentioned, the Democratic leader has made clear he doesn't want any pandemic relief to become law unless—unless—it carries a special State and local tax carve-out for high earners in places like New York.

Just imagine these Democratic leaders from New York and San Francisco going anywhere in the middle of the country and telling a working family of four, earning \$40,000 a year, that they aren't getting a relief check that could increase their income by 10 percent until millionaires in Manhattan get a tax cut.

Economists on all sides have panned this. A huge, costly tax cut for wealthy people in blue States is not the life raft that struggling people need. Even liberal economists have jumped ship. Here is what one self-identified progressive told reporters: “This is not a good idea. . . . It would not help the economy heal and it would not benefit the people who need help.” These are the economists on their side? But forget about the experts. Forget about laid-off people. Forget about Middle America. The Speaker and the Democratic leader want to cut off funding for our war with the coronavirus unless they get this special carve-out.

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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Here is another one of those dead-on-arrival demands: Democrats insist that working families, small businesses, and healthcare providers will not get any more help unless a new trillion-dollar slush fund for poorly managed States tags along. Bear in mind that States and localities have only spent about a fourth—a fourth—of the money we already sent them last spring.

Even Senate Democrats seem to acknowledge this, for example, by sponsoring legislation that would extend the deadline for the States to spend down their CARES Act aid. The States need extra time to spend what we have already sent them, and the serious estimates of the COVID shortfall that State and local governments may face are a fraction—a fraction—of the Democrats' trillion-dollar demand. Their demands aren't based on math. They aren't based on the pandemic. They want a massive slush fund to make up for decades of mismanagement.

It is just how the Speaker explained her view of the crisis. This is what she said:

This is an opportunity. Every crisis is.

That same opportunism leads them to another absurd demand. Democrats say nobody should get any more help unless—unless—the Federal Government sends out jobless benefits that pay more than what people made working. Republicans support extending a Federal supplement for unemployment—make no mistake about that—but we share the view of Democrats like the House Democratic majority, the senior Senator from Maryland, the Democratic Governor of Connecticut, all of whom indicated it should be doable to land somewhere smarter than a flat \$600.

This is not complicated. Both sides want to help unemployed people. Republicans never wanted the Federal benefit to lapse to zero and tried to extend the money. But as our economy tries to reopen, there is no reason Uncle Sam should take taxes out of essential workers' paychecks to pay other people more to stay home.

This is just a flavor of the Democratic demands. The two parties should have been able to agree on a huge sweep of subjects—from testing to school money, legal protection to direct payments and more. Republicans wanted to reach an agreement everywhere we could and then continue to fight over the contested questions later. Democrats said no because they know their unrelated wish-list items would have no prayer—no prayer—of standing on their own merit.

Only these hostage tactics could possibly get their bad ideas across the finish line. So struggling people have waited and waited and gotten nothing. That has been the Democrats' decision. Reporters can call it "hardball," like this was some ordinary standstill, but families are suffering. Americans are dying. This is not a Washington game; it is a national crisis. It would serve

the Nation better if the Democratic leaders would act like it is a crisis.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Mr. President, America is living through a crisis that exceeds anything we have seen in generations. Other countries were able to test their populations, isolate cases, and contain the spread of the disease, but here the failure of the Trump administration to develop or implement a national strategy to defeat COVID on the health front and economically has meant that the disease has raged through our country for 7 months, is still spreading, and the economy is in very bad shape.

We have over 5 million confirmed cases of COVID-19. It just took 17 days to go from 4 million Americans with COVID to 5 million. Unemployment is higher than it ever was during the great recession. More than 150,000 Americans have died. Small businesses every day are closing, and those that are still open are struggling. Families can't afford to feed their children. Americans can't pay the rent and will be thrown out of their homes. Millions are out of work, and many more worry that they will be out of work in the month or two to come. This is a huge crisis.

In this time of national emergency, Democrats believe we must focus on the health and economic security of the American people. If we don't address the health crisis, nothing else will matter, but we have to focus on economic security as well.

We have to keep Americans in their homes, put food on the table, prevent them from slipping into further hardship and poverty. That is what ani-

mated Democrats to develop a \$3.4 trillion plan to finally crush the virus and rescue American families. It was based on the needs of our country, both health and economic, the needs of our schools and businesses and workers and our healthcare system. We Democrats tell America, We have your back. Unfortunately, our Republican friends do not.

In our negotiations with the White House, Chief of Staff Meadows and Secretary Mnuchin were unable to go above \$1 trillion, and their \$1 trillion was far short of the country's needs. Democrats offered to come down by \$1 trillion. We asked our counterparts—Secretary Mnuchin, Mr. Meadows—to come up by \$1 trillion, meet us in the middle. They said no.

So last Friday, after our negotiating session with the White House, I made it clear that the reasons our talks had stalled was that the White House had basically declared "my way or the highway." They were unwilling to meet us in the middle. They said that in the room. I guess imitation is the sincerest form of flattery because now Leader MCCONNELL is blaming Democrats for the breakdown in negotiations, using the exact same language. He said Democrats are the ones saying "my way or the highway." Seriously, that is what the Republican leader, who wasn't even in the room and will not dare go in the room, claims.

Let's go over the facts—the facts. We said to the White House: We are willing to come down by \$1 trillion. Will you come up by \$1 trillion and meet us in the middle? The White House said: No, we are not budging. So to whom does this logic apply? Who is intransigent? Who is really saying "my way or the highway?" The answer is obvious. This is not a "both sides to blame" situation.

Democrats are willing to compromise. Republicans are being intransigent and will not move from their position, which is totally inadequate for the needs of America during the greatest economic crisis we have had in 75 years and the greatest health crisis in 100. That is where we are: Democrats willing to move and meet in the middle, Republicans intransigent. Republicans declared "my way or the highway," and rather than defend their position, they falsely accuse Democrats of doing the same.

Now, rather than trying to break the logjam, as a true Presidential leader should, President Trump sits on the sidelines and just issued a bunch of weak and unworkable Executive orders. He slashed the enhanced unemployment benefits, asked the Americans who are out of work, through no fault of their own, to take a pay cut. He deferred the payroll tax, which even Republicans admit will do nothing to help our workers and the economy and would undermine Social Security and Medicare to boot. And the President's Executive order on evictions is more like an Executive suggestion. It doesn't