

That happened a couple of weeks ago. So, now, because he can't get the votes because, by his own admission, 20 of his own members want no money voted in this crisis—how many Americans think there should be no money at the height of the greatest economic crisis we have had since the Depression, the height of the greatest health crisis we have had since the Spanish pandemic flu? How many Americans think the Federal Government should do nothing? But a large chunk of the Republican caucus evidently seems to, by the Republican leader's own admission.

So he couldn't even get this \$1 trillion bill passed. It was pathetic. So, now, Republicans are going to cut their original inadequate \$1 trillion bill in half in a desperate attempt to find the lowest common denominator among Republicans.

As the economic pain for millions of Americans advances, Senate Republicans are actually moving backward. Of course, up until now, the issue in our negotiations with the White House, where Leader McCONNELL had been absent, has been about the size and scope of the next relief bill. Democrats passed a \$3 trillion bill in the House over 2 months ago. Why? That is the need of America during this great crisis. We didn't come up with just any numbers. We studied it carefully. We talked to school administrators and asked: What do you need? We talked to hospital administrators and asked: What do you need? We talked to restaurants, and we talked to performance places and asked: What do you need? And we came up with a carefully thought-out bill that met the need.

Our Republican friends didn't meet the need. They came out with what they call a skinny bill at \$1 trillion. We all know why the rightwing ideology that has so gripped so much of the Republican Party doesn't want to spend any money. We, at least, in an offer to compromise, offered to meet our Republican friends in the middle. They balked. No, no, they didn't want to compromise. Their way or no way. And now, instead of improving their offer, Senate Republicans have made it even stingier and even less appropriate for the looming crisis that we have.

I am not sure what kind of negotiating strategy that is, but it sure isn't a serious strategy, and it sure will not be successful. That is why I called it cynical yesterday.

COVID-19 has changed nearly every aspect of American life. The needs in our country are so great. The pain felt by average Americans is severe. Yet the new Republican proposal doesn't include food assistance for people who can't feed their kids, rental assistance for people being kicked out of their homes, or aid to State and local governments desperate not to lay off bus-drivers and sanitation workers and firefighters.

In their new bill, Republicans will not even let the States use existing funds to cover lost revenues. It leaves

out important worker protections. It leaves out hazard pay. It leaves out broadband so desperately needed in rural areas. It leaves out funding for safe elections and help for the census. It shortchanges our healthcare system and education system.

As the school year begins across the country, the new “emaciated” Republican bill basically makes funding for schools contingent upon reopening. So if you are a school that is struggling with the costs of operating remotely, if you are a school that would like to reopen safely but needs help instituting new standards and protections, the GOP bill says “tough luck.” Donald Trump comes up with this idea that all schools must reopen, and our Republican colleagues, in obeisance, come up with a proposal that says to the millions of kids who will go to school remotely or in hybrid situations: We are going to make it much harder for you to get help.

That is to say nothing about the fact that the new Republican COVID bill is laden with poison pills designed to make its passage impossible. Someone looking at this would say: If they want to come to a compromise, why would they put poison pills in the bill that they know are nonstarters to getting bipartisan compromise? Is it because they really don't want a bill but a political issue—one that would ultimately backfire on them, I believe. But they have done it.

There is broad corporate immunity that my colleague in Illinois has so focused on—an immunity provision that would protect corporations that put their workers in harm's way from legal liability. And evidently to get a handful of hard-right Senators who didn't want to spend any money, they added a partisan school choice program long sought by Secretary DeVos—hardly a friend of public education.

Republicans call their new bill “targeted,” but by almost every measure, it misses the mark. It is impossible to look at the new GOP proposal as a serious effort to passing a law. It is impossible to look at this GOP proposal and not wonder: Do our Republican friends see the damage in America? Are they still intent on playing these same games? Are they still trying to fool the American people by calling the harshly partisan proposal bipartisan, as the leader just did?

If Republicans were serious about achieving a result, they would have joined negotiations with Speaker PELOSI, me, and the White House. If Leader McCONNELL was so eager to get something done, why wasn't he at the table for weeks? Republicans could have encouraged the White House to improve their offer, to meet us in the middle, to break the logjam. Where were the Republican Senators? I haven't heard a voice speak out and say we should meet in the middle. They are all so afraid of what Donald Trump might say, I suppose.

Leader McCONNELL, instead, crafted a partisan bill—with no input from

Democrats—even leaner and meaner than the previous Republican proposal and would rush it to the floor 2 days after releasing it. This is one of the most cynical moves by any leader I have ever seen. This isn't about making law or working in good faith with the other party. Leader McCONNELL isn't searching for bipartisan progress. He seems to be looking for political cover. It will not pass on Thursday, and we will be right back where we are today, needing our Republican colleagues to understand the gravity of this situation in our country and to work with us on a bill that actually makes some sense and deals with the magnitude of this awful crisis.

SAVE OUR STAGES ACT

Madam President, now a final matter. The new Republican bill is silent on a whole host of crucial issues, including a number of items that affect small businesses.

Over the State work period, I visited several independent music and theater venues that have struggled during the COVID-19 pandemic. Live venues were some of the first to close, and they will be the last to open up. Many of them are already on the brink of collapse. There is the rent, the utilities, and an entire year without revenue.

Live venues—by definition, people are close together, so they couldn't continue during COVID, and they have to wait until the very end. But they are so important to so many communities—urban, suburban, and rural.

Unfortunately, according to one survey, 90 percent of independent venues will have to close permanently without Federal funding. What an incredible shame that would be. These are indie music venues, jazz clubs, symphony orchestra halls, comedy clubs, and even Broadway, which is made up of dozens of small theaters that employ thousands of workers, from the box office to the backstage. These independent venues provide 75 percent of all artists' income, and they drive economic activity within our communities at restaurants, hotels, stores, and other establishments.

But what we risk if these venues close permanently isn't purely economic, although it is so important. I was in Albany and Syracuse yesterday. It is estimated that the arts are one of the top five employers in both of those cities. We can't afford to let this happen. Economically, we will lose thousands and thousands of jobs. Cities will lose city downtowns, and rural areas, as well, will lose their vitality.

The risk, if these venues close permanently, is not just economic. They are the very fabric of our society, which has been stretched to the breaking point by this crisis. Once this is all over, we will need these venues and the passionate, inspiring, artistic work that they help make possible as we come together again and try to make sense of this incredibly difficult moment in our history.

We have a bipartisan bill—Save Our Stages Act—that would create a new

\$10-billion SBA program to provide Federal grants to live-venue operators so that when, God willing, these live stages can reopen safely, these venues can come back bigger and better than ever. Those grants would go for 6 months, giving the venues enough time and breathing room to recuperate, and, God willing, if there is a vaccine in 6 months, they will be able, God willing, to open again.

One of the most difficult parts of this pandemic has been the effect on American society, arts, and culture. These are the things we live for: sports, comedy, theater, and music. When the day finally comes that the pandemic is behind us, we will want to celebrate once again with friends and family at these venues now in danger of closing.

I hope we can come together in the future to pass the Save Our Stages Act and save this essential part of American culture.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I want to thank my colleague from New York. Many of the things he has said on the floor this morning reflect what I have seen back in Illinois in the last 5 or 6 weeks that we have been home, people I have spoken to who are genuinely suffering because of the coronavirus pandemic and the state of the American economy.

There was a moment here on the floor of the Senate earlier this year when the gravity of the situation brought us together. It was March 26—almost 6 months ago—when we voted 96 to 0 to pass the CARES Act, the \$3 trillion effort to try to keep America's economy alive and breathing during this pandemic and the impact it has had on all of our lives. That is \$3 trillion—money for the unemployed, substantial sums for those who are about to see their lives transformed overnight. Laid off and fired from jobs that may never return, they tried to keep their families together with mortgage payments, rent payments, automobile loans, the credit responsibilities they faced, and just putting food on the table.

It was a wrenching, disquieting situation for so many of those families, and we said that we should give them \$600 a week—\$600 a week—in Federal assistance to get through this period. What we did not only helped those families, but it helped the economy. The money those families received was spent almost instantaneously. That is understandable. They are struggling to survive.

But we knew that the program we enacted on March 26 had a termination date of July 31. We hoped that by then the pandemic would be behind us, our economy would be recovering, and we wouldn't need any further relief. We were wrong—terribly wrong. We still face this coronavirus in a way that we never expected 6 months ago. It is still

a challenge—a terrible challenge that has claimed over 180,000 American lives to date.

I could speak for a few minutes here about our response as a nation to this pandemic and talk about the lack of leadership from the very top in Washington when it came to dealing with this public health crisis, but suffice it to say for the moment that two numbers tell the story. The United States has 4 percent of the world's population. Sadly, we have 20 percent of the COVID-19 deaths in the world.

The United States has not responded as expected. Innocent people have died. The situation was chaotic in the White House. The leadership we needed wasn't there.

Where are we today? Here we are in the second week of September. Where are we now as we reflect on the situation? Many of us believe we still face a grievous, serious challenge and need to respond accordingly, but others see it differently.

Senator McCONNELL, the leader on the Republican side, is going to offer a proposal tomorrow that is a fraction—a fraction—of what was offered on March 26 to deal with this crisis. Many people, obviously on the Republican side, feel that America is headed in the right direction and therefore we don't need to make a substantial investment in people, in businesses, and in the health and resources of this country.

For those who come to the floor and argue that America is headed in the right direction, three-fourths of the American people disagree with them. You see, in a survey taken just 2 weeks ago, 75 percent of the American people said America is headed in the wrong direction. So when the Republicans come up with a modest—almost immodest—proposal that they are going to bring to the floor tomorrow, they disagree with three-fourths of the American people.

Many of them obviously believe that we don't have to make a massive investment in helping families who are fighting unemployment, helping businesses to survive. They must believe that the worst is behind us. Well, it turns out that two out of three of the American people disagree with them. That is right—two out of three in a recent survey in America said the worst is still ahead. Wrong direction, 75 percent; the worst is still ahead, two-thirds.

What is the response on the Republican side? First, it was silence. You see, it has been almost 4 months now since the House of Representatives, under the Democratic leadership of Speaker PELOSI, passed the Heroes Act—a \$3 trillion investment to make sure that we stood by the families who were unemployed, to make sure that we put money into the hands of businesses that needed to survive, to make certain that we had adequate testing across the United States, to give money to schools so that they could weather this crisis as they readjust to

the challenges they face, and to put money in the hands of hospitals and providers that in some cases are just hanging by a thread because of the state of the economy and this medical challenge. That is what Speaker PELOSI did almost 4 months ago.

In the meantime, in that 4-month period, the Republican leader of the Senate has done nothing—nothing. He didn't bring a bill to the floor. He didn't pass a bill and call for a conference committee. In fact, during this entire period of time, the Republican leader in the Senate has refused to personally attend the negotiations between the White House and congressional leaders. Both he and House Republican Leader McCARTHY have boycotted any negotiation sessions. Any persuasion they want to bring to the issue, they bring to the floor of the Senate in speeches, not behind closed doors, where compromise is reached and where, in fact, we were successful last March, passing the CARES Act.

So now we face a challenge as a nation. Which party will stand up for America to weather this crisis and come out strong? The Democrats have a proposal. We have had it for 4 months.

The Republicans, tomorrow, will offer a skinny—some say emaciated—version of that proposal. They want to take the assistance to unemployed Americans—800,000 of them in my home State, millions across the Nation—and cut it in half. Did Senator McCONNELL get a news flash that I missed that mortgage payments will be cut in half as of tomorrow, that rental payments will be cut in half as of tomorrow, that car payments will be cut in half, that the cost of food will be cut in half? Not at all.

We know these families will face the same obligations and, under the Republican proposal, receive a fraction of what they were given and have received between March and the end of July. That is unfair to these families.

I know what is happening in food banks across Illinois, and I am sure it is the same case in Kentucky, perhaps in Georgia, perhaps in New York. People are flooding these food banks asking for help. Some of them are embarrassed by their situation. They shouldn't be, but they are. Many people who used to volunteer at these same food banks are now standing in line, looking at their shoes, hoping to take enough food home to make it through a week.

That is the reality, but it is not the reality that is reflected in the Senate action this week. What we have from Senator McCONNELL is a small effort at a time when America needs a substantial effort to deal with not only the situation facing our economy but also the coronavirus.

I am troubled, too, because I represent a State that is so diverse, with the great city of Chicago but all the way downstate—my roots—smalltown America, rural America. Many of the