

Unfortunately, Congressional Democrats have decided not to let the opportunity that moment presents go to waste. Democrats are taking advantage of the American people's uncertainty and pain in an attempt to force them to lose faith in their government, in their fellow countrymen, and in themselves. We are hearing from people that this causes them concern because they want to see us work together; they want to see us address these issues that are causing heartache together.

I have to tell you, I think it was so unfortunate that last week, some of our friends across the aisle blocked yet another targeted relief package that would have brought billions of dollars in support to the American people. I think we have to realize that this was not a vote on final passage; this was a vote to end cloture and begin the debate on that package.

Basically, what our friends across the aisle said to the American people last week is this: We don't want to talk about this. We don't want to discuss it. We don't want to debate it.

That is unfortunate. If you look at the bill that the Senate Republicans proposed and brought forward on a cloture vote last week, it is hard to tease out exactly what the problem was with it. It included another round of paycheck protection plan funding. I will tell you, in Tennessee, a lot of our entertainment venues and a lot of our restaurants need this. They need that consideration to stay afloat.

There was funding for vaccine development. Is there anybody who does not think we need a vaccine for coronavirus? I haven't met people who think we don't need to be working on that. Everybody is saying: Let's get this to market as safely and quickly as is possible.

There was support for healthcare workers.

There was support for students and teachers who are still trying to adapt to online learning.

I was just doing a virtual townhall with one of our counties in Tennessee. One of their issues is, when will there be additional funding to help us with technology, because 30 percent of our students elected an e-learning format.

Do you know what? There was even money for the post office. Back in August, our friends across the aisle thought that was a crisis, but I guess it was their drama of the day because they voted against all of this funding.

They voted for weakening the economy, I guess, and they voted against the prospects of American workers. But what they were doing was strengthening the false premise that they are the only ones capable of sparking an economic recovery. This, of course, is demonstrably false.

This week, the Census Bureau released its annual report. I will tell you that the numbers prove that the Trump administration's pro-growth policies are working. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that we passed in 2017 is working.

It has spurred economic growth. It has spurred an economy like I have never seen in my lifetime.

In 2019, incomes grew at the highest pace ever recorded. Last year, the official poverty rate fell to an all-time record low of 10.5 percent. Think about that—10.5 percent. A decade ago, there were more people than ever on assistance. Between 2018 and 2019 alone, more than 4 million Americans rose out of poverty. Think about those numbers. That is a good thing. It was the largest reduction in poverty in over 50 years. The Black poverty rate fell below 20 percent for the first time in history, and child poverty also fell to a near 50-year low.

Our record on this is very clear: The Trump administration policies worked. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act worked. That is what the American people are wanting to get back to.

I encourage all of my colleagues in this Chamber to read that report and look at these stats, and everyone should remind themselves of the progress we have made as a nation on growing this economy over the last 4 years.

Politically, everybody talks about how this is a divided nation, but we have to come together and work under an umbrella of policies that will make life better for all Americans. For the life of me, I cannot fathom why my colleagues on the other side of the aisle would throw that opportunity away.

Our citizens want us to work on a relief package that is going to help them get back to work, help our children get back to school, and allow our communities, our schools, our governments, and our businesses to safely operate with liability protections.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

TRANSPORTATION

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I come to the floor this afternoon to talk about the importance of aviation and continuing to focus on the workforce employed in aviation. I want to speak about the importance of the thousands of workers, including pilots, flight attendants, gate agents, baggage handlers, mechanics, catering workers, and many others, who are feeling the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I believe we should continue to address the very important issues of the health aspects of the pandemic and the economic impact of the pandemic, but while we are working on developing a vaccine and developing better therapeutics and testing and stopping the spread of this virus, we also need to keep in mind that we do need transportation.

Prior to the pandemic, the aviation industry supported nearly 11 million American jobs, put \$1.8 trillion to work in our economy, and contributed to about 5.2 percent of our GDP. In fact, civilian aviation is the seventh leading contributor of overall productivity. These are skilled, high-wage jobs that

are critical to our economy that cannot be easily replaced. Maintaining our aviation sector is vital to the long-term economic success of our country.

When the pandemic hit, we saw a 96-percent drop in air travel, which instantly jeopardized thousands of jobs in this sector. We worked very hard in the CARES Act to create the right balance of capital for the aviation sector to continue because it is essential. We also have workers who are essential to their jobs, so we must keep moving to solve these problems from the pandemic.

The Payroll Support Program, which was created in the CARES Act and is being administered through the Department of the Treasury, was designed to compensate aviation industry workers and preserve jobs in order to help protect the essential aspects of aviation and airline services. The program continues to cover the costs of keeping people employed and keeping this vital piece of transportation moving. This is critically important because, in just a very short period of time, September 30, this program is going to expire.

Congress needs to act to extend the program. It is important that we provide this support through the PSP program for the aviation workers who are so essential to continuing to deliver these services. Aviation not only helps people move around the country for personal reasons and essential business reasons, but it also delivers good medicine and essential mail services. The fact is that most people probably have forgotten how important airlines are to delivering the U.S. mail, but they are important.

The CARES Act included requirements to ensure that smaller markets continue to receive air service and its associated benefits. As you can see, many of the airlines, in the uncertainty of what is happening with the CARES Act extension, are now cutting services to those communities. Doing another CARES Act bill would help us to keep those services in these smaller communities. It was announced that as many as 50,000 airline jobs will be at risk if we don't continue the Payroll Support Program.

Now is not the time to be uncertain. Now is the time to give the airline sector the importance that it deserves by having airline workers continue to do their jobs. Every job lost means a worker earns less. It means the slowdown of the economy as a whole. It means that consumer spending, which is a big engine of our economy, will slow down, and 70 percent of our GDP comes from that consumer spending. So these programs are important.

If the Payroll Support Program is not extended, the cost for workers who will lose their jobs will simply be shifted to the States in the form of unemployment benefits, and since we aren't solving the problems of the States, the States also add to the GDP, so we are not helping the GDP unless we come to a resolution within the CARES Act.

Unemployment doesn't cover the cost of a full salary. Each worker would have less to spend on gas and groceries, on a mortgage, and on medicine. In the downturn of the economy that we have been facing, we can't afford more loss.

Our economy is showing some signs of modest recovery as the result of the economic stimulus from the CARES Act, but many of those benefits are expiring. I can tell you, as a Member from the Pacific Northwest, I hear a lot from businesses that didn't get help and support in the PPP program and want it to continue so that they, too, can be on par with some of their friends and neighbors who have been able to succeed economically.

Right now, we are at a turning point at which we need the PSP program to continue and to help give certainty about transportation. Nationally, on average, we know an aviation mechanic takes home about \$1,600 per week in pay, but when these jobs are cut, the weekly incomes are cut. Let's look at a few States and a few examples.

Right now, in North Carolina, the weekly income for a mechanic is only \$350 a week in unemployment benefits, and that worker is facing a 79-percent cut in weekly income. So I ask our colleagues to consider, as you think about shifting these transportation workers from these salaries that they are getting now to unemployment benefits, how dramatic these cuts will be in some of these States.

I am proud that I come from a State in which we have a pretty robust unemployment benefit. I thank our State and the people who vote for and support a robust unemployment benefit, but if we continue to not act on the CARES Act and the PPP, we will be sending people home to States with unemployment benefits that will be much less robust than in my State. Right now, to face a 79-percent cut in one's weekly income I don't think is good for the aviation sector.

On average, when you look at the weekly income for ramp agents in Georgia, it is about \$850, but now that any additional weekly benefits have run out, these workers face a 57-percent income cut. In State after State, we see these cuts in these weekly incomes. This means, as I said, less money to spend on groceries and less money to spend on essentials at home. Without any additional weekly benefits, in Florida, pilots will see a 92-percent drop in income, flight attendants a 75-percent drop, mechanics an 83-percent drop, and ramp agents a 68-percent drop. In Texas, pilots will see an 85-percent drop in weekly income, flight attendants a 52-percent drop, mechanics a 68-percent drop, and ramp agents a 48-percent drop.

My point here is to think about the need for us to continue this program in that not all States are going to be treated equally in how aviation workers will be affected. We have to think about how we are going to keep that

important air travel moving for our economy.

Without the extension, flight crews, flight attendants, and others will be impacted in another way, in that, when you stop air transportation services, people, after a period of time, will have to come back and be retrained and recertified. Many times here, I have participated in debates about tax credits or tax policy. Oftentimes, we go past our deadline of December 31 and into the new year. Even though we can't reach a conclusion, most people think: Well, that is OK. We will make it retroactive, so going past our deadline doesn't impact anything. In this case, it does impact something because, once we hit the October 1 deadline and we start seeing these people in unemployment situations, the time starts ticking for the cost of recertifying them to be in that cockpit or to be of service.

For example, pilots have to meet certain flying requirements to maintain currency in their pilot licenses. So, without an extension of the PSP, flight crews and flight attendants would need to be retrained at the cost of starting up again. A PSP extension also means supporting their wages and making sure that they have available healthcare during this time period.

I don't want to see one more American lose one's healthcare benefits because of COVID. We are in a COVID crisis. We want people to be covered with healthcare so that we can help to fight this pandemic. I know people here in Congress are looking at the very short time period that we have left before September 30. I call on my colleagues to set aside our differences and come back to the table and make sure that we address these issues before this major layoff.

This is important because, as I said, this affects the GDP of our country. We still have an opportunity to sustain 950,000 frontline aviation workers, which is important to helping our economy recover. As I said, it is important because aviation helps to grow opportunities for the future.

My colleague Senator SCOTT and I will tomorrow be announcing other aviation legislation that we, too, think will help the aviation sector. For every 10 percent of travel that returns to aviation, it drives more than \$1.5 billion into our economy. Those are salaries and wages and other aspects of this sector. That is the economic impact that we will have by returning flight service.

The original premise around the COVID bill was for us not to decimate the airline industry so much, because of the COVID impact, that it wouldn't recover and so that we wouldn't be there to retrain and take advantage of the upside as the public responds. We have now gone from that 95-percent loss of travel to, right before the Labor Day weekend, about 40 percent of airline capacity and travel. We want to continue being ready to serve the public who has to fly, and we want to

make sure it is safe for the public to fly. Getting this extension of the COVID bill done before September 30 still remains a key priority.

On the point of aviation, I would say to my colleagues, besides the Cantwell-Scott bill we will be dropping tomorrow to help focus on more aviation safety, my colleague Senator WICKER and I remain committed to continuing to work on aviation safety as it relates to certification legislation. I hope all of our colleagues on the Commerce Committee will continue to focus on that as well.

WILDFIRES

Madam President, I would now like to say a few words about another pressing issue in the State of Washington, and that is the issue of fire.

Yesterday, we heard from the Deputy Forest Chief that we needed 5,000 firefighters in the United States to help fight fires. It is clear that we don't have 5,000 firefighters helping as COVID has impacted our ability to fight fire. So I call on the President to help us reach out to the international community to help us get more firefighters into the United States.

While Washington and Oregon may eventually see wetter weather in October, we still have massive fires that we are going to see in California in the month of October. We need to get more firefighters into the United States to help us fight this incredible attack by Mother Nature on our communities. We can't leave them defenseless. We need to give them a frontline in the defense, so I call on the President to help us get more international support for fighting fires in the United States of America.

Additionally, I will be supporting my colleague Senator WYDEN's efforts today on prescribed burns and the ability to change our policies and do prescribed burns at different times of the year, which is to say burn some of the fuel that we think could become fire breaks and stop fires from becoming larger and larger. The fuel break helps to create a line of defense. We supported this legislation several years ago. Unfortunately, it didn't make it into the big fire fix bill when we stopped fire borrowing. Nonetheless, it remains a big priority.

What we have come to learn now is that trying to do prescribed burns in the summer months, when you have clearer air, doesn't really help—it is not helping us because we have such large-scale fires and these very unhealthy smoke events that last for days and days. Now, thanks to the new fire forecasting models that we have and the new fire forecasters that we put in the previous bill, we are now seeing how unhealthy those conditions really are. They are so unhealthy that they are cause of major concern for health officials across the whole West.

So what do we need to do now?

We need to pass this proposal that I support, along with my colleague Senator WYDEN, to move prescribed burns