

neighbors, friends, coworkers, and colleagues.

I will tell you, many of them remain divided, but I think we have to say they have been engaged. According to the Pew Research Center, Americans participated in this election cycle at the highest rate in 120 years. Election officials still haven't finished their counts, and already we know that more than 144 million ballots were cast this cycle.

I would venture to say that many of those millions of individuals are watching us. They want to see what we are going to do next, how we are going to conduct ourselves. They don't really care if it takes a little multitasking; they are saying it is time for Congress to do its job.

You can look at all of the exit polling on the favorability ratings of Congress. I will say it is discouragingly low—the regard in which the American people hold their elected representatives collective body. It is time for us to get some things done.

Judging by the footage of demonstrations in many of America's major cities, you might not remember that we are still dealing with the effects of a global pandemic. It seems that for a few days, people forgot there is a pandemic.

Democrats in the House and the Senate have wasted months of precious time obstructing the passage of targeted COVID relief legislation that Tennesseans and New Yorkers and Californians and every other American who owns a business or supports a family needs not tomorrow or today; they needed it yesterday, last week, last month.

I have spent the past several months coming to this floor to tell the stories of Tennesseans, Tennessee small business people, Tennessee employers who are desperately in need of relief, trying to help my colleagues on the other side of the aisle understand that there is fear and pain in certain sectors of our economy. It is really so inappropriate that those fears and that pain are something they have chosen to ignore. To be frank, it has been like talking to a brick wall. There has been no response.

Just last week, I met with the board of the Academy of Country Music for a very hard discussion about the future of their industry. Not one single venue or one studio musician or one sound engineer—their whole industry shut down. This is an industry that has shut down. They did nothing wrong, mind you. They showed up for work. They built businesses. They hired people. They used independent contractors. They paid their bills. They paid their taxes. They did nothing wrong. But the entertainment industry—live entertainment—is shut down.

This isn't the huge record labels and big entertainment companies that many people think are the music industry. These are the mom-and-pops. These are the small businesses, the sole

proprietors, the independent contractors. These are the people who set up and tear down stages. They put on these amazing sound and light displays that people get so excited about seeing and that really make music and entertainment come to life. They produce the music that you walk around listening to in your earbuds. The support staff at the venues clean up your beer cans and ticket stubs after you have enjoyed a show. I tell you, they also are the artists, the storytellers, and I really think our creative and cultural historians.

This industry is absolutely dying. They are not the only ones. There are so many other sectors of our economy that are at a standstill. They are suffering, and so many other people have been suffering. They are tired of what they see as posturing here in DC, using the hurt and the suffering of people as just a political bargaining chip. Do you know what? They have noticed. They have been watching over the past few months. They know that very little has been accomplished, and they think it is time to stop putting politics over people. It is time to stop saying "We want the issue if it is good for us" because people are looking for solutions.

They were waiting for a mandate—our friends over on the left—a mandate they were sure was going to come their way on November 3, but the American people refused to deliver them a mandate. You see it in elections that took place at the local and the State level. You see it in the congressional elections and certainly here in this Chamber.

So far, Speaker PELOSI has refused any offer to compromise. Every offer and gesture that has been made by the White House or this Chamber has been refused. She has clung to that \$3 trillion parody of a relief bill that she has stuffed to the brim with billions for liberal pet projects that have nothing to do with COVID recovery—nothing at all. Isn't it interesting that her pet project is not the American people? Wouldn't you think she would want to solve some of these problems? But no—she would rather play politics.

This absurd delay has come at great cost. We have so many Tennesseans, indeed, across this country, millions of families and small businesses that will tell you they are in damage control mode because Democrats refuse to allow them the dignity of hope that targeted relief would provide. "Dignity"—that is a nice word. And we have so many people who are grasping, trying to pay their bills, keep their businesses alive. I will say that our friends across the aisle twice—twice, twice—have declined to vote for targeted relief.

It is not too late to step up on behalf of those who have lost just about everything and those who still have a shot at coming out on the other side of this pandemic with their livelihoods intact. It is not too late to pass legislation that would provide better unem-

ployment insurance, more help for small businesses, resources for schools and universities, vaccine research funding, testing funding, and liability protection—targeted relief for millions of Americans who have said: This what we need in order to keep people employed and to keep our businesses open.

The legislation is written. All that needs to happen is our friends across the aisle need to say: We are ready to vote on this package. Let's do another round of PPP. Let's do a plus-up in unemployment. Let's do that money for vaccines and testing and resources for schools and universities. Let's give companies the liability protection they need to open their doors. Let's give these entertainment venues the liability protection they need in order to again get on the road, have concerts, play that music Americans love to listen to. It is there.

To my friends, let's have no filibusters, no more distractions, and no more extravagant wish lists of pet projects. For goodness' sake, put your politics aside, and let's put the people first. Let's provide the relief they are seeking.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REELECTION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, before I make my remarks, I want to take a moment on the floor of the Senate to formally and officially thank the people of the State of Illinois for electing me to another term in the U.S. Senate.

On election night, when the results were apparent, I went and stared into an iPad to announce my victory speech. It was unlike anything I had ever been through in a campaign, and I said so. It was an extraordinary campaign experience, made even more difficult and challenging because of the pandemic crisis. I want to thank the people of the State for standing by me and giving me this chance to serve again.

I am honored to serve my State in this body, especially during this time of transition in America and transition around the world. Together, with a trust in science with the Biden-Harris administration, we will return to our national agenda. I am eager to continue working to help the families, small businesses, schools, hospitals, and constituents in my State and to help all of us in this country endure this pandemic together.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, COVID-19 did not take a day off for the election. While election week was brewing and all of us were glued to our television screens,

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most of the country was unaware of the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was worsening. Cases of the virus and hospitalizations in the United States have been spiking for weeks now. On Saturday, we hit the highest daily total of new cases—126,000 new cases on Saturday. In Illinois, we are approaching half a million cases. The State has tragically seen more than 10,000 of our neighbors and friends die from this COVID-19. The country is on pace to hit 1 million new cases every week by the end of this year.

This is disastrous, and it demands action. Thankfully, President-Elect Biden has announced an extraordinary task force of respected public health and medical experts—truth tellers, real leaders. Like the NIH's Dr. Fauci, I trust Dr. Kessler, David Kessler, whom I have known for decades; Dr. Morita, who served so admirably in the city of Chicago; Dr. Atul Gawande, one of my real heroes in medicine today—I have spent a lot of money on his books and have never regretted a penny of it; and former Surgeon General Murthy—what an extraordinarily talented man he is and the others who are part of the team.

Yet we need to continue to stay safe and remember that this virus is not anywhere near being gone. There are 10 million Americans who have now contracted the virus, and we have lost 238,000 American lives. My heart goes out to everyone who has lost someone in this pandemic and to those who are still suffering due to this virus.

In addition to the health and safety of the American people, we have also been struggling to deal with real economic uncertainty, job losses, food insecurity, stress, and childcare. It is a long list. Despite these urgent needs of families, small businesses, workers, health providers, and unemployed Americans across the country, unfortunately, the leadership in this Chamber has dragged its feet and offered only a few very weak measures that barely address the overwhelming needs of this Nation. This is why Americans have not received another round of economic impact payments, rental assistance, or enhanced unemployment assistance, and it is why hospitals are not receiving additional funding.

Speaker PELOSI and House Democrats passed the Heroes Act in May—a \$3.4 trillion relief package. After negotiating with the White House, they then passed the second version of that—a \$2.2 trillion package. Unfortunately, the Senate majority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, refused to consider either of these proposals and even refused to attend the negotiating sessions. The last Senate Republican response was inadequate—\$500 billion. It may seem like a fortune until you look at a nation in the midst of a pandemic and at an economy struggling to survive.

If the Republicans are serious about negotiating a real package—if they want to demonstrate to the American people what leadership looks like, with

real solutions for real problems that families face—then I call on Senator MCCONNELL to show up to the negotiating table and give up these rogue attempts to pass empty, halfhearted measures.

The Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Jerome Powell, a conservative Republican economist, has repeatedly warned of potentially dire economic consequences if additional fiscal relief is delayed. As hiring begins to pick up in a few sectors—thank goodness—too many populations, including African-American workers, Hispanic men, and women with children, are being left behind.

We need to focus on helping the American people through this pandemic. We need to do it now. This is the so-called lameduck session between the results of an election and the swearing-in of a new Congress and President, but shame on us if we don't use this time together in Washington as an opportunity to do more than vote for a random Republican judge. Can't we roll up our sleeves on a bipartisan basis and realize what is really happening across America as this pandemic heats up and more Americans die every day?

We need at least \$75 billion for additional testing and contact tracing to slow the spread of COVID-19—far more than the meager \$16 billion that was offered in the Republican measure.

We also want to put \$57 billion in for hospitals, clinics, and health providers. Just a couple of weeks ago, I was on the phone with these administrators. They are desperate. We are going to lose hospitals across this country and, I fear, maybe even in our own State if we don't step forward and do something.

What is wrong with increasing, at least to some degree, the amount available for food stamps—the so-called SNAP program—so that hundreds of millions of Americans who go to food banks to survive get a helping hand? Is that too much to ask in the month of Thanksgiving and in the month of Christmas?

We must also include more economic support for households through a second round of economic impact payments and through reinstating enhanced unemployment benefits.

I continue to hear about struggles from hospitals that are on the brink, from workers who have lost their jobs, and from small business owners who are desperately trying to keep their heads above water. Unfortunately, the Senate continues to waste time on proposals that place the needs of Big Business ahead of the needs of small families. History will judge this body on how we respond—not on the best speech given on the floor—or on how we failed to respond to the worst pandemic in a century and the deepest recession in 75 years.

The American people are looking for leadership. We cannot let them down.

Madam President, there is another aspect of this that I would like to address for just a moment.

After each Presidential election, there is a transition period when a new President is coming in and his team takes a look at the government as it stands and prepares for the day of January 20, when that new President will be sworn in. All of the networks and major news sources have declared Joe Biden to be the President-elect and KAMALA HARRIS, our colleague here from the Senate, to be the Vice President-elect. They are now bringing together the people who are their experts to prepare for a smooth, orderly transition.

Before that can take place, the Administrator of the General Services Administration must file something called an ascertainment that ascertains in fact there was an election and someone won. In most cases, it is very routine. It is just done automatically based on the reports from the States that we already have as we sat busily by the TV, day after day, doing our emails and texting to friends and families, waiting for the returns to come in. The announcement was made on Saturday, and the reaction was all across the country.

You would think that the Administrator of the GSA would have the ascertainment necessary to really pull the trigger for a transition from the Trump administration to the incoming Biden administration. These are routine things that have gone on in past years without really much controversy. Yet, lo and behold, this year, there is controversy.

For the past 60 years, since Congress passed the Presidential Transition Act to ensure a smooth and orderly transfer of power, the GSA Administrator has usually ascertained the apparent winner within 24 hours of the election. By passing the Presidential Transition Act, Congress has acknowledged how critical this period is for the safety and well-being of the country. Once the GSA makes this ascertainment, the executive branch can provide crucial services to the transition team to make sure there is a smooth transfer.

Remember when I mentioned earlier that we are in the midst of a pandemic, with thousands of people dying? Why would we want to see a delay or some bureaucratic indecision that might jeopardize a person's health or a person's life in the midst of this pandemic?

Once the GSA makes that ascertainment to provide services, it includes access to classified information for incoming national security officials; background investigations and security clearances for potential nominees; State Department-facilitated foreign leader calls; access to SCIFs and Federal agencies for discussions on personnel, budget, and policy; and access