

empower transportation workers around the country and fight with a doggedness that would make him proud.

#### WORKER SAFETY

Mr. President, this spring I was talking with a grocery store worker in Southwest Ohio, who told me: You know, they call me essential, but really I feel expendable.

That grocery store worker and thousands of others are on the frontlines of this pandemic. They risk their lives so that Americans can keep food on their tables and get their packages delivered. They are changing linens in hospitals. They drive buses. They stock shelves in supermarkets and drugstores. Then workers go home at night. They worry they are going to bring to their home the virus and infect their family—always the anxiety they live with.

We know that hundreds of thousands of workers have been exposed to the virus on the job. Thousands have died. We don't know exactly how many because the President hasn't directed his government to make it a priority to keep track of these numbers. Think of that.

We know UFCW—United Food Commercial Workers—reports that more than 16,000 grocery store workers have been exposed at work. More than 100 have died. Sixteen-thousand exposed at work. More than 100 have died.

National Nurses United has recorded at least 1,700 deaths, and 58 percent of those healthcare workers who died were people of color. Seventeen hundred have died; 58 percent, people of color.

In meatpacking plants, we know the toll has been horrific. As of this summer, 16,000 workers in meatpacking plants, including in the Dakotas, the vast majority of them Black and Brown workers, and more than 230 have died. We can only expect those numbers to be higher.

What is the President's response? In the White House, they are putting up holiday displays with a lit-up ceramic post office and ornaments in the shape of garbage trucks and nurses' hats. That is right. Workers are dying around the country, and instead of doing anything at all to protect them, the President of the United States is decking the halls with ornaments. Workers don't need Christmas ornaments; they need fair pay, and they need protections on the job.

President Trump hasn't lifted a finger to protect frontline workers. Let me explain. I make a charge like that, I back it up. He spent 4 years in office putting corporate lawyers in charge of the Department of Labor. The Secretary of Labor made millions of dollars practicing law by representing corporations against workers—sometimes union workers, sometimes unorganized workers.

The Department of Labor makes it easier for corporations to skirt safety rules. The point of the Department of

Labor, the point of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, is to protect workers. Yet this Secretary of Labor, this Department of Labor—including from IBEW workers to steelworkers, to meatpacking workers—he refused to issue workplace safety requirements throughout the pandemic. He failed to get workers the protective equipment and medical supplies they need to protect themselves. He forced people back to work in meatpacking plants around the country.

In South Dakota, we know, in a meatpacking plant owned by the Chinese Communist Party, 1,300 workers got sick in one plant, and 4 of them have died that we know of.

The Trump administration fined this multibillion-dollar meatpacking—Chinese Communist Party-owned meatpacking plant—fined them \$10 a worker. Thirteen hundred workers got sick and OSHA, the government, the President, fined them \$10 a worker. But don't worry, he and his wealthy contributors who come for White House tours without masks or social distancing will get to look at some sparkly ornaments.

President Trump could crack down on corporations like Smithfield. He could mobilize American manufacturers to get every American worker the masks and the protective equipment they need. He could issue an OSHA temporary standard, as we have asked him repeatedly, that would provide clear enforceable requirements for keeping workers safe. He could stand up for workers, but he won't.

That is fundamentally why he lost. Eighty million Americans decisively rejected this President and his total lack of empathy, his complete failure to understand the dignity of work.

There are a lot of Senators in this body—not a lot. There are some Senators in this body whose mothers or fathers carried union cards and knew that was their ticket to the middle class and understood that their mothers and fathers were protected by OSHA, protected by the Department of Labor that cared about the safety of those workers in the workplace.

But all that the President did do to ignore workers and didn't do to protect workers, none of that is stopping him from trying to do more damage on his way out the door. The Trump USDA, the Department of Agriculture, is trying to race through a new rule—trying to push through, in the last weeks, a new rule that actually speeds up chicken factory processing lines; that is right, not slow them down in the face of record infections at these plants but speed up the line.

We know it is a trick. It is the oldest trick in the book. You make more money if you speed up the line. You speed up the line, and workers are more likely to get hurt. When you speed up the line during a pandemic, more workers are likely to get sick.

They tried to pass the rule earlier. It was held up over concerns workers

would get hurt and salmonella would spread. That is not even counting COVID. But to President Trump and his allies, more workplace injuries and more grandparents hospitalized by salmonella are a small price to pay if it means more profits for meatpacking companies.

Trump and his corporate lawyer Secretary of Labor are pushing through a new policy to ensure that companies can continue to exploit workers by classifying them as independent contractors. Go back to the childhood of a number of Members of the Senate who had parents who worked in factories and parents who worked in construction jobs, parents who carried a union card. You know what that would mean to those workers and the threat that they could get sick.

Think about it now. Corporations love this new business model. It is a way to classify people as independent workers. It is a way to pay people less for the same work, skirt labor laws, wash their hands of responsibility for the workers who make their businesses successful.

These workers aren't working for a big insurance company that really does have a public image they are trying to protect. These workers aren't working for a hospital or a big bank that cares about its public image. These workers are working for an entity hired by these big banks or by these insurance companies to prepare the food or to provide the security or to do the custodial work—a company you have never heard of that has no public image because this company is all about being hired by large corporations. They then can pay them lower wages. They can then protect them less on the job, and they can then not provide benefits. That is what happens with contract workers—those independent contractors. We know they love this business model. They can pay workers less. They can skirt labor laws.

President Trump wants to make that easier, partly, because he probably does that in his business, and he has a whole lot of corporate friends—big contributors to the Trump campaign who make more money by doing that.

Fundamentally, President Trump, Senator McConnell, and their corporate allies just don't understand the dignity of work. They think workers are always a cost to be minimized instead of the engine behind our country's success.

Think back again to those Members of the Senate whose parents carried union cards who cared about all this, who had a chance—in a job like this, who had a chance for opportunity because those workers carried a union card and were treated decently on the job. Because those workers carried a union card, their bosses couldn't think of them only as a cost to be minimized. They did think of them as the engine behind their country's success.

The American people rejected that—the 80-plus million people who voted

for a new President. They voted against the President who treated workers as expendable. They voted for the candidate who put workers at the center of his campaign.

Joe Biden had the most pro-worker campaign in a generation, and in January we get to work to deliver results. The new President, right now, on January 20 can immediately issue an OSHA emergency temporary standard forcing corporations to take important, critical, decisive steps to protect their workers from contracting or spreading the virus in their workplaces.

What is more important than protecting workers, especially essential workers who deliver our food, who prepare food, who do custodial work, who do security work, who are helping people in our country live every day?

With cases rising and hospitals filling up all over the country, the end of January isn't soon enough. Workers put themselves at risk in nursing homes and hospitals. They deliver packages of holiday gifts. They stock supermarket shelves with supplies for holiday meals.

Some of those workers are going to get sick. Some of them are going to die. They are going to die because they are essential workers, but we don't treat them like essential workers. We can do something about it now. We could pass a real plan that invests in protective equipment for them. We can pass a real plan of testing and contact tracing. We could get money to small businesses like Liz Valenti's business in Dayton, OH, so they can protect their workers—her two restaurants in Dayton.

Well, what is Leader McCONNELL doing? Ramming through more Trump nominees like Mr. Hauptman and Mr. Waller, who keep stacking the deck in favor of their Wall Street friends, trying to hold on to their power even after Americans said: No, we want something different—80 million of them.

MITCH McCONNELL needs to stop letting Donald Trump sabotage our economic recovery on his way out the door and get to work for the people he serves.

It is time to remember what makes this country great. If you love this country, you fight for people who make it work—our workers who organized in union halls and church basements and fought for workers' rights, women's rights, and civil rights.

In closing—I know that Senator LEE wants to speak. I have worn for my time in the Senate and before that, I wore this pin on my lapel. It is a depiction of a canary in a birdcage. You may remember the old labor story of the worker, the coal miner who took the canary down into the mines. If the canary died by suffocation or lack of oxygen or some contaminant in the air, the mine worker got out of the mines. He had no union in those days to protect himself, and he had no government that cared enough, that was strong enough to protect him, and he had no government that cared enough to pro-

tect him. He was essentially on his own.

This pin was given to me at a workers' Memorial Day rally by a steelworker who told me about this pin and what it stood for. He knows that the labor movement changed this country for the better. It created the greatest economy and the strongest middle class on Earth. It said the opposite of what MITCH McCONNELL says to workers all over the country: Sorry. You are on your own. What this canary pin represents is, we are all in this together. It means we fight for the dignity of work. It means if you love your country, you fight for the people who make it work. We can do that again. We can protect workers from this virus. We can build a better system centered on the dignity of work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

ALS DISABILITY INSURANCE ACCESS ACT OF 2019

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, it is nothing short of a tragedy when anyone suffers from ALS. This is a progressive neurodegenerative disease, one that attacks the nerve cells in the brain and the spinal cord of its victims and eventually affects control of the muscles, even the muscles that are needed to move, to speak, eat, breathe, and otherwise live.

Sadly, this is a disease that is always fatal. The average life expectancy is only 2 to 5 years following diagnosis. Not only are the people who suffer from ALS robbed of time but also their ability to work, imposing great hardships on them and on their families.

The bill that we had before us today to help these victims by reforming our Social Security Disability Insurance Program is a good cause, and it is one that I think we all support, but I think it goes about the job in the wrong way. It sets bad precedent, and it fails to include other needed reform.

We must remember that ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, is one of many similarly debilitating and deadly diseases that Americans are suffering from today. While not as well known, all of these victims are also deserving of the same kind of special attention and accommodation in Federal policy.

Let's review some of the background of the program. The Social Security Disability Insurance Program, or SSDI, was created, in part, to help people who suffer from conditions like ALS, providing monthly cash benefits to those who become disabled and therefore unable to work.

One challenge with a program like this is that the agency administering the program, that is, the Social Security Administration, has to verify an applicant's eligibility for benefits before they can start sending out the checks. Today, eligibility determination takes an average of 3½ months. For some people and for some diseases, including ALS, 3½ months can be a dangerously long time.

So, in 2018, the SSA established a new policy to fast track the applica-

tion process for those with serious and urgent medical conditions. Under this Compassionate Allowance Initiative, more than 200 diseases now automatically make applicants eligible for expedited review.

But while the Compassionate Allowance Initiative shortens the determination process from an average of several months to an average of 39 days, there is still a lengthy 5-month waiting period to actually start receiving the benefits, and in the case of urgent, fatal diseases, that is still too long of a wait.

The bill that we have before us today seeks to address this problem but only for the victims of ALS. Now, obviously, we should try and help the victims of this tragic disease to the very best of our ability. They are not, however, the only ones who need to be helped. Of the list of compassionate allowance conditions, some are just as urgent as ALS and some are even worse. There are, sadly, several for which there is no known cure and that have life expectancies that are terribly short.

I want to cite some examples. For instance, Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, a degenerative brain disorder, is among these. This particular disease leads to dementia and most often results in death within 6 to 12 months. Tragically, there is no cure, and around 1,000 Americans are diagnosed with it every single year, including a dear friend of mine in Utah who a couple of years ago passed away from this ailment.

Another is cardiac amyloidosis, also known as stiff heart syndrome. This disease affects the way electrical signals move through the heart, leading to abnormal heartbeats and faulty heart signals. For those diagnosed, there is no known cure, and they typically face a life expectancy of only about 6 months after the onset of congestive heart failure. About 4,000 people develop this condition each year.

Take peritoneal mesothelioma, this disease is a cancer that develops in the lining of the abdomen, usually leading to death within 12 months of the first signs of illness. Around 600 cases are diagnosed every year in the United States.

That is why I have been working for the past year with my colleagues to broaden the scope of this legislation, so that Congress doesn't waive the SSDI waiting period one disease at a time. It should not matter which fatal, rapidly progressing and debilitating disease an American is suffering from—all fatal diseases with no known cure should have access to disability benefits after their Social Security Administration determination.

The men and women who suffer from those conditions and the family members affected by their ailments have precious little time left, and they are just as worthy of help. They are certainly no less worthy of help than those with ALS. There is always hope that a cure can be found for them or