

this terrible, unprecedented pandemic, over 90 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. In the midst of a pandemic, they are not sure whether they can afford to go to a doctor.

We are coming to the close of one of the most terrible and painful years in American history. That is a tragic fact. Over 330,000 of our people have died of COVID-19, and, as we speak, we are seeing recordbreaking numbers of new cases, and hospitals around the country are being overwhelmed with new admissions.

During the last year, the education and well-being of tens of millions of our young people, from childcare to graduate school, has been disrupted. The terrible emotional isolation this pandemic has caused, where people are unable to spend time with their families and friends, has resulted in a huge increase in mental illness, drug addiction, and even suicide.

As I mentioned, the House has done the right thing. By an overwhelming vote, Democrats and Republicans voted to increase that \$600 direct payment to \$2,000. A recent poll came out, and 78 percent of the American people think that was the right decision. They are hurting. They want help. The leaders of our country—President Trump, President-Elect Biden, Minority Leader CHUCK SCHUMER, the Speaker of the House, NANCY PELOSI—are all in agreement: We have to raise that direct payment to \$2,000.

So that is where we are right now in this historic moment. Do we turn our backs on struggling working families, or do we respond to their pain?

So, Madam President, would the Senator modify his request that immediately following the vote on the veto override, the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 9051; that the bill be considered read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill with no intervening action or debate; further, that, if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection to the request for modification?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original?

Mr. SANDERS. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING 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.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, this is our historic moment. We can see the

suffering across our country. We can see how desperate people are. We can see how during this holiday season, the people are looking at the prospect, in the words of Tony Fauci, where the worst may be ahead of us for these families. The worst may yet to have been actually inflicted upon families and our country. Yet the Republicans are refusing to allow for a vote on giving each individual \$2,000 in order to make it through the rest of this pandemic.

Senator SANDERS today speaks for the millions of Americans who are suffering through a devastating health crisis, an unemployment crisis, an eviction crisis, a hunger crisis, and a crisis of faith—faith that their leaders in this country will stand up and provide for Americans in their hour of need.

Meanwhile, we here in Washington must confront a moral crisis: Why can't we keep working families from starving even as we stand ready to approve a massive defense bill?

That is why I am here with my colleague BERNIE SANDERS to call for a simple vote to provide \$2,000 in direct cash payments to Americans across our country. It is this simple. Just like they did in the House of Representatives, the Senate should have a vote—up or down, yes or no—on providing these increased cash payments to desperate Americans. We can get this done quickly and before the holiday if Leader MCCONNELL will simply agree to do it. They already had this vote in the House, and 44 Republicans voted for it. Give the Republicans in the Senate the same opportunity to vote. We already know that many of them have already said they will vote for the \$2,000 if they get a chance to vote. It is this simple.

We can do this because a simple vote will just say that you want to provide a grand total of \$2,000 to Americans who need it to pay the rent, to keep the electricity on, to buy diapers, to pay for lifesaving medication—just to survive this devastating pandemic. There are 44 House Republicans who voted for the \$2,000 checks. I believe that the Republicans in this Chamber will do so as well, and President Trump has already made it very clear that he will sign the bill. So we can see where the opposition is. It is with the leadership of the Republicans in the U.S. Senate.

People across our country are falling ill and falling behind on their bills, and for the families of the hundreds of thousands who have died from coronavirus, the medical and funeral expenses are compounding their grief. They need money in their pockets.

In Massachusetts, this past Sunday, we hit 100 deaths in a single day—the highest death toll our State has seen in a 24-hour period since the very beginning of this pandemic. In the week before Christmas, 21,000 new people in our State applied for unemployment benefits just as Donald Trump let these protections lapse before millions of Ameri-

cans lost their benefits, and that is a tragedy.

A \$2,000 check is the most direct and effective mechanism for delivering economic relief right now to those who are barely holding on throughout this crisis, particularly low-income Americans, immigrant communities, and our gig and service workers—our essential workers. They need help. They have been helping our families, and we need to help their families. Right now, these checks would help 158 million people across our country pay for housing, put food on the table, and make sure that grandma and grandpa have their diabetes or heart medication.

That is why Senator SANDERS, Senator KAMALA HARRIS, and I introduced legislation to provide every person in our country, regardless of immigration status, with \$2,000 monthly recurring payments in order to help weather this storm. We knew then, 7 months ago, that a single \$1,200 relief check was not going to be enough to help families get by, and the \$600 payment in the latest coronavirus package is a crumb to the working people who have faced economic hardship through no fault of their own. It won't even cover a month of rent, let alone heating bills, food bills, Wi-Fi bills for students who are learning from home, and all of the other expenses that are piling up for these families.

Now, some of my Republican colleagues have said that providing \$2,000 would be too expensive. Well, here are some other costs they seem to have forgotten. If our proposal to increase stimulus checks to \$2,000 is soaring, the overall cost of the stimulus bill would go from \$900 billion to \$1.36 trillion. Yes, that is a \$464 billion increase over what we were currently projecting for this bill, but it is only a fraction of the \$740 billion Defense bill that this Chamber stands ready to approve again this week.

I hate to say this, but my Republican colleagues seem to be more interested in funding defense than in funding the defenseless, and that is what this debate is all about. What do we do to help these defenseless families? In this moment of national crisis, we were able to afford spending three-quarters of a trillion dollars on a bloated defense budget—spending that was supposed to protect our country yet did nothing to inoculate against the most profound public health emergency in a century—but we can't give hungry and suffering Americans \$2,000? That is a moral failure for our country. Give Americans this money.

Most of my colleagues support this defense budget. They got to vote on it a few weeks ago, and I know they stand ready to override President Trump's racist, belligerent veto. We are here today, asking the same thing for \$2,000 payments—a simple up-or-down vote. Let's bring the House bill up for a vote. Leader SCHUMER is committed to bringing it forward. We can get this done before the holiday. We can do this for Americans before the year is out.

We must remember that what makes America the envy of the world is not simply the strength of our defense and military but the strength of our people—people like Ahmed Jaya, a parent of three, who was laid off from his job as a doorman at the Omni Parker House in Boston this past March. Ahmed receives \$400 a week in unemployment benefits, but it is not enough to cover the bills that keep rolling in as he now faces expiring health coverage as well. It is people like Tanya DiStefano, from Spencer, MA, who gave birth to a beautiful baby boy on Halloween, to return from the hospital to find an eviction notice taped to the front of her door. These are the stories that should be driving our fights. These are the people who need relief now. And these checks will go right back into our economy because people will spend this money. They need it for the necessities that are confronting their families right now.

Last week, Donald Trump used these people as political pawns. He stalled signing the coronavirus relief package, claiming that he wanted to give \$2,000 checks to every American. By delaying, President Trump may have stifled unemployed Americans out of \$300 this week in unemployment benefits—benefits that they will not get back. So let's now hold Donald Trump to his word. Let's bring this to a vote, and let's pass \$2,000 relief checks for every person in our country and put that bill on Donald Trump's desk.

This pandemic has laid bare the tragedy of two Americas—one in which billionaires have grown their wealth by \$931 billion over the course of this pandemic, an America where the rich continue to get richer, and the other America that has seen unprecedented economic uncertainty, Great Depression-level unemployment rates, and devastating losses. It is one in which Blacks and LatinX workers suffer disproportionately higher rates of unemployment and their families suffer higher rates of coronavirus infection and death; where workers get laid off while CEOs get raises and companies engage in stock buyback plans; and where residents get evicted or their electricity shut off but major corporations barely pay taxes.

For those workers and families and struggling households in America—for the very vast majority of America—\$2,000 is a lifeline, and it is time for Leader McCONNELL to bring this legislation to the floor for a vote. The American people have a right to know where every Member of the Senate stands on this issue. They now know where President Trump says he stands, and they now know where every Member of the U.S. House of Representatives stands. The American people have a right to know, in this desperate time that we are living through, who was on their side to give their families the help they needed.

Senator SANDERS is right. We should have a vote—it should be yes or no—

and we should do this before the end of this year.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Connecticut.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, America has 600 billionaires. Now, \$1 billion doesn't sound like a lot of money these days. President Trump just signed a bill, begrudgingly, that has \$900 billion in it. But trust me—\$1 billion is still a whole lot of money. It is actually so much money that it is really hard to find words to describe what it looks like, but let me try.

If you are, for instance, one of the half a million Americans who make the minimum wage in this Nation and are lucky enough to work 40 hours a week, guess how many years you would have to work in order to get \$1 billion. Five hundred years? A thousand years? Ten thousand years? No, you are not even close. If you make minimum wage in America today, you would need to work for 75,000 years in order to make \$1 billion—75,000 years. Neanderthals were roaming the Earth 75,000 years ago. Those guys, if they had made minimum wage, would have had to have worked up until present day, every single day—that is, of course, if they hadn't spent a dime of the money they had made in order to accrue \$1 billion.

One billion dollars is a bananas amount of money, and there are 600 people in America today who make at least that amount of money or have that amount of money to their names. That is crazy. With \$1 billion, you are leading a life that, frankly, none of us can really imagine, right? You have private planes. You have yachts. You have household staffs in the dozens. You have enough money to make sure that your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren and your great-great-grandchildren never have to work a day in their lives. Generations of your offspring can just live lives of indolent luxury, without a care, if they so choose.

Do you know where I was 2 days before Thanksgiving this year? I was at Hamden Middle School, in my State, to help hand out free food for the unemployed, the poor, and the disabled ahead of a long holiday weekend. Those long weekends can be really hard, especially the ones that fall at the end of the month when the SNAP benefits have long run out. I got there as darkness fell but right at the beginning of the event. I noticed that down the hill from the roundabout at the school at which they were handing out the food, there was usually an empty parking lot. That night, at that moment, at the beginning of the event, that parking lot was lit up by hundreds of sets of headlights of hundreds of cars that were just sitting there, idle, in that parking lot.

I asked the organizer of the event what was going on in that parking lot.

Was there some other event happening that evening? Why all the cars?

He told me: The cars started pulling into that lot hours ago. They got wind we were handing out food, and they got here early to make sure they didn't get left out. We have enough food for 300 people, and there were 300 cars in that lot before I even got here.

That is what has happened during this pandemic. Millions of families all across this Nation, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs or have had their hours dramatically cut back. They have no savings because work doesn't pay in this country anymore. They spend everything they earn each month.

So when the economy collapsed, virtually overnight in the spring, they got desperate—really fast.

I want you to think about what it is really like on an hour-to-hour basis when you don't have enough money for food for your family. The decisions you have to make every single day are practically animalistic. Do you make your kids go hungry during the day, when they need the most energy, or do you skimp on dinner and force your kids to go to bed with hunger pangs?

There are hundreds of thousands of mothers and fathers who, right now, as I am speaking, are making that decision today. That is the reality of this pandemic.

But here is another reality: Those 600 billionaires in this country? As it turns out, as a group, they lost nothing—nothing—during this pandemic. No, exactly the opposite. They got richer.

The wealthiest 600 Americans collectively added \$1 trillion to their bank accounts. Let me say it again. The richest 600 Americans gained \$1 trillion over the course of 2020.

Let's be clear. That is not money that grew in their money tree orchards. Yes, we are printing some more money these days, but wealth isn't far away from a zero-sum game still. So when we allow for 600 people in the country to control 50 percent of the Nation's wealth, that is coming out of your pocket.

Six hundred people in a country of 328 million isn't a lot of people. But do you know what is a smaller number than 600? Fifty-two.

There are 52 Republicans in this Chamber—52 people who are going to have a decision to make about what to do in a country where millions are literally starving as we speak, while 600 billionaires count the \$1 trillion in additional wealth that they have accumulated during this period of national calamity.

The question before these 52 Senate Republicans is simple. It is simple: Should we give \$2,000 to low- and middle-income Americans right now to help them survive this crisis? That is the decision Senate Republicans have to make right now. Time is running out.

Six hundred billionaires got \$1 trillion richer this year, and the question