way, is not the right way to do it. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I listened carefully and watched three occasions on the floor this afternoon where Senators SCHUMER, SANDERS, and MARKEY have tried to create an opportunity where the Senate would actually come together and vote, where the Senate might make a decision based on the merits of this issue, rather than to keep talking around the issue.

What is at stake is a substantial sum of money for families who are in the midst of the struggle of their lives—$2,000—characterized a few moments ago by my friend from Texas as ''Speaker PELOSI's idea.'' Well, I might remind him that it is also Donald Trump's idea and still is. The President has told us this morning that we should move on this as quickly as possible, and although I don't often come to the floor to agree with the President, he is right. In this instance he is clearly right.

What are we doing now? We are calling Senators back to Washington from the far reaches across the United States. This morning, I received some email and text messages from some of my colleagues hopping on airplanes at 6 a.m. on the west coast to face a vote. What is this vote all about? Well, first, it is to override the veto of the President when it comes to the Defense authorization bill. This was certainly something that was occasioned by one Senator, the junior Senator from Kentucky, who forced us into a position where that vote needed to be taken here. It could have been handled much more efficiently and to the benefit of all Members if it was scheduled for the weekend when we were assuming a new session of Congress. But he insisted, and we are returning and, frankly, putting in peril again, in the midst of a pandemic, Members of the Senate who are traveling from all the far reaches of this country to be part of this action in Washington.

But it isn't just the junior Senator from Kentucky who is having us sit here in Washington and wait for things that could be taken care of with dispatch. It is the senior Senator from Kentucky as well. He has decided that we will not get a vote on the House measure to increase the payments to $2,000. Make no mistake, there is only one way to bring this relief to the families of America. It is to pass the bill already enacted by the House of Representatives—a bill which received 44 Republican votes in addition to a substantial number of Democrats, with only 2 voting no. Forty-four Republican votes joined with the Democrats to call for this measure which many have been decrying on the floor here as a class struggle or whatever their argument might be. There is no other measure, including Senator MCCONNELL's alternative, which has any ghost of a chance to help the families in this country with this $2,000 benefit. The only thing that will do it—the only one thing that will do it—is this bill that has already passed the House of Representatives.

The House has recessed. When they are going to return is uncertain. They certainly don't have the time to work through the regular order of business to consider any new legislation even if we could send it in time, which I believe is very doubtful. So it is up to Senator MCCONNELL to decide right here and now, are we going to come together as a Senate this afternoon at 5 o'clock, when we are supposed to be back and voting, and get this matter done?

Bring it to the Senate for a vote. Let's have this vote up or down, and let the Democrats and Republicans express their will on behalf of the families in this country.

I couldn't agree more with the Senator from Massachusetts and his characterization of what families face across this country and, certainly, in my home State of Illinois.

I just wonder if any of the Republican Senators who are downplaying this economic crisis facing these families have really looked into the issue. This morning, in the Senator's home State of Texas, they showed an early morning television show and the cars that were lining up for food banks—long lines of people waiting for food banks. They interviewed some of them in Texas who told heartbreaking stories of how they once were volunteers at this same food bank and are now dependent for a helping hand if they were going to be able to feed their families.

These are people who are not lazy at all. Misfortune has come their way, and the question is, Will we help? This is our opportunity—today. It is a measure that has passed the House of Representatives, not some theory of some legislation that might be considered tomorrow—today. Let's have this vote today, this evening. When the Senators have returned, let's determine whether or not this House-passed measure of $2,000 is going to be enacted into law, since the President is clearly anxious to sign it.

That to me is the reasonable thing to do. In fact, it might even sound like the U.S. Senate is taking a vote on a timely issue after a debate. We do it so seldom around here that I think we have lost our muscle memory when it comes to this activity in the Senate. It is time to return to it.

I thank the Senator from Vermont, the Senator from Massachusetts, and, of course, the Democratic leader for bringing this issue before us this afternoon. But it shouldn't end with our great speeches. It ought to end with an important vote for the people of this country.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, would the Senator from Illinois yield for a question?

Mr. DURBIN. I am happy to yield.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wonder if the Senator from Illinois would consider pairing their request for a $2,000 direct payment with a liability shield provision that would guard businesses that have been operating in good faith and following the guidelines put out by public health and government institutions, and preserve a right to sue for reckless and willful disregard of the rights for others? Would the Senator consider pairing those two together?

Mr. DURBIN. I would say in response to my colleague, I know his passionate defense of the notion for immunity from liability for corporations in America. He has introduced a lengthy bill on the subject. I don't believe that is consistent with keeping this Nation safe during a pandemic, and it certainly is not responsive to any onslaught of lawsuits.

The Senator might be interested to know that the number of medical malpractice cases filed in the name of COVID–19 since the onset of this current pandemic is slightly higher than the total number of lawsuits filed by Donald Trump in protesting the results of the November 3 election. This is not a tsunami of lawsuits.

I believe we can take reasonable measures to support and defend those corporations and companies that are making a good-faith effort to comply with public health standards and protect their employees and customers. His bill, I am afraid, goes way too far.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, let me concur with my friend from Illinois on the issue.

I have a question for my colleague from Texas. It is a very simple question. You have concerns about the issue of corporate liability. I get that. I happen not to agree with you. You are entitled to your opinion. You may or may not be concerned about section 230 of the 1996 Federal telecommunications bill. That is fine too. We might have a discussion about how we protect American democracy. It is a good discussion as well. But I have a strong feeling, Senator CORNYN, that in Texas, as in Vermont—you know what—people are not really talking about corporate liability. It is a good issue. It is an important issue. I don't believe they are talking about section 230. What I think they are talking about, as the Senator from Illinois just said, is how they are going to feed their kids today. That is the issue. And what I would ask my friend from Texas is, What is your problem with allowing the Senate to vote on whether or not we are going to allow Americans, working-class people to get a $2,000 check?

Now I gather that when that vote comes to the floor—and I hope it comes

immediately—you will vote no, and you will explain to the people of Texas why you voted that way. That is called democracy. I respect that. But what is your problem with allowing the Senate to have a free standing vote?

There are a number of people on your side, Republicans, who have already come forward and said yes, they want to vote for this $2,000 check.

Now, if you want to deal with corporate liability, that is fine. Let's deal with it at some point. Bring forward a bill, and we can vote on it up or down. All that we are asking for is a simple, up-or-down vote on the issue that tens of millions of people are talking about right now: Will they survive economically in the midst of this terrible pandemic?

I ask my colleague from Texas: What is the problem with allowing the U.S. Senate to vote on the bill passed by the House?

I yield to my colleague from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I would say to our colleague from Vermont, I have no problem with providing assistance, whether it is to public health officials who are trying to struggle with this pandemic or to provide money for research for the therapeutics or vaccines which, fortunately, are now being distributed around the country. I have no objection to direct payments to individuals. I voted for the $1,200 direct payments contained in the CARES Act. I voted for the additional money that is provided for in the most recent COVID–19 legislation. But this legislation that the Senator from Vermont is advocating would benefit households with annual incomes of over $350,000. They would get this money.

I would say that one way to deal with this—because, of course, we negotiated back and forth on the last COVID–19 bill, and nobody got everything they wanted—but if our colleagues on the other side of the aisle want an additional financial benefit for people making up to $350,000, why not couple it with liability protection for people who are acting in good faith?

This isn't just about corporations, and our colleagues across the aisle know it. This is about schools. This is about churches, synagogues, and mosques. This is about every business that is worried that a game of ''gotcha'' is going to take place and they are going to end up paying the price. Even if they win the lawsuit, they will still have to pay for the cost of defense, potentially losing their businesses outright.

Clearly, our colleagues across the aisle care more about trial lawyers and being able to bring litigation against businesses that have tried to do their best and have struggled with the evolving public health guidance provided by the CDC and other authorities. Clearly, if they are not interested in engaging in a negotiation where people, who through no fault of their own, find themselves victimized by frivolous litigation, then, we have no alternative but to continue to object to this request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, if you listened carefully, you understood that my friend from Texas did not answer my question. He has a concern about corporate liability. It is a legitimate debate. Do you know what? Bring it to the floor. Let's vote it up or down. I will vote against it. You will vote for it. But I asked you a very simple question, not about linking things together—nobody in the real world understands that stuff. That is inside-the-beltway stuff.

What people in the real world know—and I want to take a moment to read some of these statements. We have a lot of people on our social media, and we asked the American people, just the other day: Tell me; what would a $2,000 check mean to you? What is going on in your life?

And in just over 24 hours, I would say to my friend from Texas, nearly 6,000 people responded. Here is just what a few of them had to say. This is Twitter stuff. So I don't have their names here, and I wouldn't use them publicly, anyhow. But this is what they say.

One person writes: ''$2,000 is the difference between keeping our apartment and being evicted.'' Here is another one: ''$2,000 means I can afford to feed my three kids.'' Another response: ''It would mean not having to choose between rent and groceries and not having to ration my partner's meds.'' Another response: ''I am raising my grandson with medical needs. I am $4,000 behind on utilities. We need electricity to run his medical equipment.'' Here is another response: ''$2,000 would mean I wouldn't have to worry about making my mortgage payment this month, and I could get my medication.'' Another response: ''$2,000 would mean paying my rent and getting lifesaving treatment because I can't afford the $50 copay through my work insurance just to see my neurologist right now''—and on and on and on. Thousands of people responded.

So, I want to get back to the point. I want to again say to my friend from Texas: If you have a concern about corporate liability—good issue—bring it to the floor. Let's vote on corporate liability.

I would yield for a question from my friend from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I yield for a question through the Chair.

I have listened to the figures used on the floor about families who would qualify for the $2,000. It is my understanding that an individual with an income of $75,000 or less could qualify for the $2,000 payment, and for a joint return—husband and wife—$2,000 could be given to them if their income is under $150,000. Is that your understanding?

Mr. SANDERS. That is my understanding. And I think, you know, as Republicans do, they are going to let it be.

But I get back to my friend—my friend from Texas, Senator CORNYN. We are asking a simple question. If you want to bring up corporate liability, bring it up. If you want to bring up section 230, bring it up. If you want to bring up the man in the Moon, bring it up. But what the American people want now is an up-or-down vote.

Look, you are going to vote against it if it comes to the floor. That is fine. It is your right. Explain it to the people of Texas. I will vote for it. But all that I am asking for is the right, as a U.S. Senator, to have the vote.

Again I ask you: What is your problem with Members of the U.S. Senate, including a number of Republicans, who have already indicated they would like to vote for this? What is your problem with bringing that up as a single stand-alone bill, not merged with corporate liability or anything else? What is your problem with that?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I would say to our colleague from Vermont: This money is not targeted to people who have suffered financially.

Mr. SANDERS. Then vote against it.

Mr. CORNYN. It is not targeted to people who have suffered financial losses. This money would go to members of your own staff if they meet the financial requirements and to other government employees who have suffered no financial loss during this pandemic.

We have all suffered in different ways during the pandemic, to be sure, but, financially, this money is designed to help the people who need it the most. Why would you send money to government employees who have been receiving their full paycheck during this pandemic?

Mr. SANDERS. That is a good question. And then I will have to explain that to the people of the State of Vermont.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas has the floor.

Mr. SANDERS. He asked me a question, as I understood it.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. SANDERS. Did the Senator from Texas ask me a question?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. It was more of a rhetorical question.

Mr. SANDERS. I took you literally.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I wanted to come to the floor and talk about what strikes me as something akin to Groundhog Day. Groundhog Day is only the day I was born. It is something I feel like we are living through here as we debate the same points over