

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 life-saving 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

and over and over again, forgetting what it is we have already done—the good things we have done together on a bipartisan basis.

We have already appropriated roughly \$4 trillion in response to this pandemic, and it is appropriate that we have done so because this was a true public health crisis. But now this is—we are seeing politics creep back in in an attempt to send money in an untargeted and wasteful sort of way to people who have suffered no financial loss.

These relief packages that we passed together have provided hundreds of billions of dollars to support our hospitals and healthcare workers who are on the frontlines. I voted for it, and I think we were right to do so.

We have thrown small businesses and their employees a lifeline through the Paycheck Protection Program, and we were right to do so. We have invested in research, development, and manufacturing of therapeutics and vaccines that are currently being administered—thank goodness—throughout the country and, indeed, around the world. And we have sent unprecedented assistance to workers, families, and individuals whose livelihoods have been upended by this crisis.

Thanks to President Trump's leadership, Congress has stepped up and met this unprecedented challenge to deliver relief bill after relief bill for the American people. If you had told me a year ago I would have voted this year alone for roughly \$4 trillion worth of spending in this pandemic, I would not have believed you. But I do believe this is a domestic equivalent to World War II, where we have to do everything humanly possible to try to help our fellow man, woman, and child during this pandemic.

The latest round of relief came, of course, just this week, when President Trump signed the \$900 billion rescue package into law. While I am glad Congress was able to send more relief out the door at the end of the year, I am disappointed that it took so long to do so. It is amazing the sense of urgency our Democratic colleagues have today, since at least three times—maybe four times—they blocked our attempts to pass half-trillion-dollar relief bills during the course of the summer.

In July, our colleagues introduced the HEALS Act, which would have provided just under a trillion dollars in relief, covering the same types of policies included in the most recent relief bill—direct payments, unemployment benefits, funding for schools, vaccines, and a host of other priorities.

Our Democratic colleagues not only complained about the bill, but they called it weak, little, pathetic, and unserious. They refused to engage in the sorts of negotiations that are customary around here when you actually want to solve a problem or consider anything short of the House's multi-trillion-dollar bill, which they knew had no chance of passing in the Senate

because of things like tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, which had nothing to do with COVID.

So our Democratic colleagues dragged their feet—July, August, September, October, November. Months went by, and the cases soared, and the economic squeeze tightened, and our Democratic colleagues refused to accept any sort of compromise.

That was until a few weeks ago, when they finally changed their tune right after the election. I am sure it comes as no surprise that once the holdout agrees to negotiate, things can move pretty quickly, and that is what happened here after the election. Democrats, Republicans, and the administration agreed to a \$900 billion package, which looks very similar to the one they dubbed pathetic just a few months ago.

In recent days, the President has expressed an interest in doing more, and I have no doubt that we will do more in this area, but Speaker PELOSI's bill goes far beyond what the President is talking about. For one, it would dramatically widen the pool of recipients, enabling wealthy households to qualify for relief checks. This is unacceptable and wasteful.

When Congress provided the first round of direct payments through the CARES Act, we did so in a way that sent relief to the hardest hit Americans. Individuals who made up to \$75,000 received the full \$1,200, and the amount gradually declined as income increased and completely phased out at \$99,000. We kept the same formula for the \$600 payments provided for under the omnibus and further targeted the relief. Once again, those who made up to \$75,000 will receive the full amount, and the amount phases out completely at \$87,000.

Under the CARES Act, a family of four earning up to \$150,000 received \$3,400, and in the most recent rescue bill, the same family would receive an additional \$2,400. This was the most effective and targeted way to ensure that assistance goes to those who actually need it while avoiding sending taxpayer dollars—borrowed, I might add—to those who don't.

The House-passed legislation would provide \$2,000 payments, but it doesn't have a similar structure to keep these payments targeted. Let me give you an example.

If this bill were to become law, a person making \$100,000 a year would receive a \$750 check from the Federal Government, whether or not they lost income during the pandemic. This isn't someone who used to make that much but was laid off or had a reduction in their income. Someone who is currently earning a six-figure salary would receive an additional \$750 from American taxpayers.

For families, the income barrier goes higher. As I mentioned a moment ago, if you have a family of five with an annual household income of \$350,000 a year, that family would receive a stim-

ulus check under the House-passed bill. Now, that is not being smart with taxpayer dollars, and that is not targeted at the people who actually need it. That is a giveaway to people who have not suffered any financial losses during this pandemic and clearly not targeted at those who need the most help.

I mentioned a moment ago that the median income for households in Texas is \$60,000 a year, so this family of five is earning nearly six times as much and would still receive a check from taxpayers. That defies all common sense. Even the Washington Post editorial board dubbed this policy as wasteful because of the huge amounts destined for what they call "perfectly comfortable families."

Even though Congress has already provided roughly \$4 trillion in relief to the American people, our Democratic colleagues are acting as though this is the first and only way to help our country.

Like I said, for them, every day is Groundhog Day. They ignore everything we have done in the past and act like this is the only thing we have or could do. It is just not true.

This debate isn't about whether or not Congress should help families who are struggling. We have. And there is no question we will continue to do so where needed. That is why we provided \$1,200 in direct payments to the hardest hit Americans through the CARES Act and an additional \$600 through the most recent relief bill. That is why these bills also bolstered State unemployment benefits and expanded them to include independent contractors and the self-employed. That is why Congress passed legislation to provide food assistance to families, keep more hard-working Americans on payroll, and ensure our economy is on track for a strong recovery.

Again, we did this thanks to the leadership of President Trump and by working together in a bipartisan way.

Countless Texans have told me about the impact of this relief on their businesses and their families, and we can't lose sight of the progress that has already been made. But future relief must be targeted. We need to support those who need it and avoid sending hundreds of billions of dollars, as this proposal would, to those who don't need it.

Throughout the year, I have been an advocate for an incremental approach to these relief bills because I think it is hard to spend \$3 trillion and know exactly how that bill is going to work. And, indeed, we found out through the CARES Act that the mainstream lending facility, which we funded at roughly half a trillion dollars, wasn't as useful as we would have hoped.

Conversely, the Paycheck Protection Program was more successful than our wildest dreams. So I think by seeing what works and what doesn't work, we can be better stewards of taxpayer dollars by spending the money more efficiently and in a more targeted way.

This isn't like highway bills or farm bills or defense spending bills where we have an idea about what is needed for individual programs. There was no precedent for this pandemic, no handbook, and no clear way to gauge how long this crisis would go on or what would be needed to sustain our response.

After the CARES Act passed, we knew it made the most sense to hit the pause button and see what worked well, what didn't, and where more help was needed. As I said, there were certain programs like the Paycheck Protection Program that almost immediately dried up. If I am not mistaken, in 2 weeks, roughly \$350 billion was obligated under the Paycheck Protection Program—a strong indication that we really hit the sweet spot when it came to helping those small businesses. That is why we added more funding in April, another \$320 billion, and we extended the program in July and reinvested in the Paycheck Protection Program again in the omnibus.

As I said, there were other places where the money went unspent. But, fortunately, in the most recent bill we were able to repurpose hundreds of billions of dollars in unspent funds, again, to target it to where the need was greatest and where it could help the most.

There is no question that tens of millions of workers and their families have been hurt by this virus. We all know that. And I think we have all acted together, by and large, responsibly, in trying to respond to that. No one will be left out if we have a means and method of targeting this to those people—whether it is direct payments, enhanced unemployment benefits, incentives to their employers to maintain them on payroll. And now that we have the beginning of the distribution of the vaccine, my hope is that in the coming months we will get back to, if not the new normal, whatever the next normal will be.

But we are just a few days from kicking off the new Congress, and I have no reason to believe that our coronavirus relief work is finished here today. As a matter of fact, Vice President Biden said that he expects to send us an additional request for help once he assumes office.

Once the legislation we have passed has a chance to benefit the American people, we will see if more relief is needed, and then, if it is needed, we should absolutely do more.

I still believe in the wisdom of the incremental approach, and I believe our Democratic friends will join us in responding to the true needs of this crisis without monthlong delays or irresponsible spending.

Countless Texans have told me about the importance of the relief we have provided through direct payments, unemployment benefits, food assistance, and other forms of support by the laws we passed throughout this year. I was proud to support each of those policies,

which have eased the financial strains on millions of Texans and other Americans. I will continue to work with our colleagues to provide assistance as our war on COVID-19 rages on.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, we have heard a lot of revisionist history this afternoon.

Look back in March, when Congress did the right thing and the Senate voted unanimously. Because of our efforts, 13 million people were kept out of poverty—we know that—because we provided relatively generous unemployment insurance. We did the direct payments. We helped with small business loans. But then this Senate thought its work was done for the year. We begged Senator MCCONNELL month after month after month to come back and help.

As I said, 13 million people were kept out of poverty because of the work this Congress did in March of this year, but now, since—many of those benefits, especially the unemployment benefit and the direct payments, were not continued, of course. Those benefits expired in August, and we have seen 8 million people drop into poverty in this country since. Yet Senator MCCONNELL refuses and refuses and refuses.

I hear this revisionist history that Democrats just want to help people who are already affluent and give them more money. Well, remember back in March, the only amendment that we considered, the only amendment that Senator MCCONNELL allowed on the floor of the Senate to the CARES Act, the only amendment was to take away the \$600-a-week unemployment insurance. The only place Republicans fought was the \$600-a-week unemployment insurance. That more than any single thing we did is why people were kept out of poverty. Now the best we could do was \$300-a-week unemployment insurance—the best we could do. In spite of Senator CORNYN's and others' comments, Senator MCCONNELL waited, waited, waited, and waited. Finally, we were able to do that.

The President of the United States threatened to veto it, causing millions of Americans to fall off their unemployment insurance. We know all that. It is just important to remember all that.

But there is one simple question before the Senate this week: Are we going to put more money into people's pockets? The American people made it clear on election day that they want a government that is on their side. This is our chance to deliver for them, to show people whom we serve that we can make a real difference in their lives, which we did back in March.

It is pretty simple. The best way to help Ohio workers and families is to put more money in their pockets, not

in the bank accounts of the largest corporations and biggest banks, hoping it will trickle down. We know it never does. The CEOs just pay themselves instead.

We know that just recently there was more good news for American CEOs who are able again to do stock buybacks, more dividend distributions. A lot of corporations have made a lot of money—more power to them—during this pandemic, but those are the corporations that continue to get the big tax breaks.

We need, instead, to directly invest in people who make this country work. It helps people pay the bills and stay in their homes and get through this downturn. It injects money into local economies that really need it. The more money people have, the more they spend in small businesses that are hurting.

We know this works. It did in the spring. We came together. We crossed the aisle, passed the CARES Act, expanded unemployment, and provided direct stimulus checks, keeping 13 million people out of poverty. The bill we passed last week was a good step in that direction, but we should make it stronger.

Back in March, my original plan that I tried to negotiate as I sat with Secretary Mnuchin and a handful of other Senators was \$2,000 per person, adults and children. We called for it to be sent automatically throughout the year, every quarter, as long as we remained in a public health emergency.

It is clear now what we could have done and should have done. No one could predict how long this crisis would last. Today, we still aren't sure when everybody will be vaccinated and when the economy will return to full strength. We don't want to sit idly by. We don't want to wonder how bad it could get. We are the strongest, richest country on Earth. We have the resources to do something about it; we just need leadership willing to use every tool we have.

If they refuse to support this \$2,000 per person, if they refuse to support these direct payments, Leader MCCONNELL and Senate Republicans will again make it perfectly clear to the American people whose side they are on.

Every time there is a fork in the road and Senator MCCONNELL and Senate Republicans have to make a decision—either go with corporate interests or go with working families—every single time, they choose corporate interests. They had no problem pouring money into corporate coffers with their tax cut and blowing up the deficit.

Just down the hall here in Senator MCCONNELL's office, I remember lobbyists lining up, looking for those tax cuts back 3 years ago, and they got those tax cuts. They didn't say anything about government deficits back then—\$1.5 trillion added to the deficit. They didn't mind that because that was money going into their contributors' pockets, into big corporate coffers