

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

for the wealthiest people in this country. They were all too happy to let the government shovel loans to the biggest banks and companies. But in the middle of the worst crisis of our lifetime, faced with the chance to give money directly to ordinary Americans, my colleagues claim we can't afford it. That is just simply a lie. We are the richest country on Earth.

I remember Bill Spriggs—an economist at Howard University—told the Banking and Housing Committee in September: We didn't win World War II by worrying about whether or not we could afford it. We were in a global crisis. We marshalled all our vast resources and talents to rise to meet it. We grew the economy from the middle class out. We paid down the debt with rising wages.

If we have learned anything from the crisis, it should be that we can do the same again. Americans are tired of being told we can't. It is the only answer that Senator McCONNELL and Senate Republicans ever have for most people's problems: We can't help you. We can't solve your problem. You are on your own.

Let's aim higher. Let's deliver for the people we serve. Let's put \$2,000 into their pockets—money that will make such a difference for so many families. It will help a mother worried about how she will pay back rent. It will keep a laid off restaurant worker from turning to a payday lender. It will allow a father to buy a new computer so his kids are better able to learn online. These are millions of real people—people we swore an oath to serve who would breathe a little easier this new year if we pass this.

So let's be clear about the decision today and this week before the Senate. Are we going to give the people we serve \$2,000, or are you going to stand in the way? It is that simple. Let's come together. Let's pass this. Let's make a real difference in people's lives.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, this is what I have considered to be—and I have heard my friend from the Democratic side, the minority side, say the same thing, that this is the most significant bill that we pass every year.

It is the NDAA, the National Defense Authorization Act. This will be the 60th year—is it the 60th or 61st year?

Mr. REED. The 60th.

Mr. INHOFE. OK. It is the 60th year that we have passed this, and it has passed every year. There were a few

moments there where I thought maybe it wasn't going to pass this year and we would set a record. Senator REED and I don't want to set that kind of record. We want to make sure we get this done.

The reason this is important is this is the blueprint. This tells us what we are going to be doing with our troops. I could make an argument that it is really—we are in the most dangerous situation, I think, that we have been in before. I have often talked about the good old days when we had the Cold War with two superpowers. We knew what the Soviet Union had; they knew what we had. Mutually assured destruction meant something at that time.

But now it is different in a lot of respects because you have rogue countries out there that have weapons and have abilities to wipe out nations. That is why it is so significant.

So, anyway, we suffered through a little bit of a problem back during the Obama administration, during the last 5 years, which would have been from 2010 to 2015. In his budget, he downgraded the military by 25 percent, and that is the same time, during that timeframe, that China increased theirs by 83 percent.

So it is a scary world out there, and it is one that, to me, I have no doubt that this is the most important bill that we will pass all year because we have got our kids, and they are out there right now. They are in the trenches, and we have to support them. That is what it is all about.

I do want to mention how many people are involved in this thing. We are actually starting this right now. We are starting next year's NDAA. So this started a year ago. The ones working on this—you have Liz King and John Bonsell heading up the minority and majority part of the committee, doing a great job and working every weekend—almost every weekend—with a very large staff, all specialists in certain areas. And they have got the bill.

So I am very proud of the bill that we have this year. I think that it passed, when it passed in the Senate, it was 84 to—I think it was 84 to 14, I think it was. I think there were a couple of people not here. But that is the largest—that doesn't happen very often, to pass a bill with those margins, and we did.

So this is a long tradition. We have got to support our troops. They are in there doing the right thing. It has been a joy, personally, for me to be working with Senator REED, and we have, together, kind of provided the leadership on this thing. We didn't work as hard as the staff did. I admit that. But we were there, and I am very proud of this bill.

So right now we have kids that are overseas, and they deserve the pay that was increased—that would be increased when this bill is passed. Right now, we have critical areas like pilots and engineers, doctors, that are in short supply because of the fact that we have had,

up until the pandemic, a good and probably, I would argue, the best economy we have had in my lifetime.

Well, that is good news, of course, but it is bad news in one way because it is hard to keep the people in those critical fields—pilots, for example. They have an opportunity to get out and do things that are—there are jobs out there that are paying a lot more. So we have to have them on the flight hours if something happens. And they are out—there are a lot of jobs on the outside that are paying more. So we just have to make sure that we keep the resources in the right place to do the right job.

So I think this is the—I know this procedural vote today is going to bring us, in the next couple of days, to pass the Defense authorization bill.

It is all about the guys and gals in the field. We owe it to them. This is going to be the 60th year. I anticipate that this is going to pass with very large numbers.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I would like to rise and discuss the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act.

First, I would like to salute the chairman. He has done an extraordinary job. We have both served on the committee for many years, and this is probably the most challenging year we have had due to many different factors: the pandemic, the virtual hearings, all those things.

And this has been particularly challenging, and the chairman, at every point, stood up to the challenge and led us. I want to thank him for that. It was a pleasure working with him.

We all recognize that this legislation passed both Chambers, the House and the Senate, by overwhelming bipartisan majorities. And it is very important legislation. That is why it earned this bipartisan support.

It enhances our national security. It strengthens our military readiness and defense capabilities. It protects our forces and their families and supports the defense industrial base.

Despite all that it does for our troops and their families, President Trump waited until the 10th day after he received it and vetoed it the last day he could exercise his veto. That was December 23, which made quite a Christmas for our military personnel and for all of my colleagues who are here today to start the process of responding to that veto.

The House already took the first step. They returned on Monday. Once again, by an overwhelming vote, over 300 Members of the House overrode the President's veto. Now we face the same task in the Senate. It is my hope we can quickly and resoundingly override