

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, here in the Senate, we are continuing to move forward with the next installment of coronavirus relief legislation. I expect, later today, we will pass the bill that was passed by the House earlier, and we are looking beyond it to a third bill that will provide additional relief to the American people.

As the leader has said, we have three priorities: providing direct assistance to American workers and families, many whose lives have been disrupted and dislocated in jobs, who are feeling a lot of economic harm, economic pain; giving our economy, especially our small businesses, the necessary support with which to weather the storm; and most importantly, providing medical professionals with the resources they need in order to fight this virus. The House bill addresses these priorities to some degree, but it is not a comprehensive bill, and additional legislation is going to be needed.

We especially need to ensure that the worker benefit requirements the House bill places on small businesses are accompanied by sufficient support. Small businesses are at the most risk economically during this time, and we need to ensure they have the resources they need to get through this. I am looking forward to continuing to work with my colleagues of both parties on the House bill and on additional legislation.

This is a time for all of us to come together to ensure that medical professionals, American businesses, and American families have what they need to combat the coronavirus and to deal with its effects. I can't think of a time at which we have seen schools and businesses close on such a mass scale. It is a challenging time for our country, but if we pull together, we can get through this and come out even stronger.

All of us have roles to play in combating this virus—washing our hands regularly and thoroughly, practicing social distancing, staying at home as much as possible, listening to advice from healthcare officials. All of these things are essential to our flattening the curve and limiting the number of infected Americans.

It is vital that we keep as many people as possible from getting infected so that our hospitals and medical professionals are not overwhelmed with cases. Our medical professionals are putting their lives on the line every day to care for coronavirus patients. Let's make sure we do everything we can to keep the number of cases they are dealing with as low as possible.

In difficult times, Americans rise to the occasion, and I am confident that is what we will do again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I walked outside across the Capitol grounds, and it is such a beautiful day.

The cherry blossom trees are blooming. There were mothers with young children, 3- and 4-year-old children, playing on the grass, and it seemed like just so idyllic, so perfect. It seemed like nothing could be wrong in America.

But, in fact, so much is wrong in America. Our everyday rhythm of life has been shattered. We are facing a medical pandemic and an economic collapse: K-12 schools, closed; universities, shut down; grocery stores, empty; restaurants, locked; gyms, movie theaters, music venues, closed for business.

The reverberations of so many core businesses and core retail being shut are affecting virtually every family and every small business across this country. So many forms of commerce are grinding to a halt. The economy is imploding, and it is touching the workers and it is touching those small businesses. Workers are experiencing the reality of reduced hours, lost shifts, layoffs; and they don't know when they are going to be able to pick up that work again.

Then, they are not sure how they are going to pay their utilities. How are they going to pay their rent? How are they going to pay their mortgage? And when will America and the economy start to heal, and when will they be able to go back to work?

So the American people are anxious and worried, rightly, about the threat of the disease and worried, rightly, about the collapse of the economy.

Coronavirus is marching on America. As of yesterday—or, actually, as of this morning—we have almost 6,000 cases here in our United States of America—5,881 cases as of this moment. Compare that to a week ago. We are talking about 1,200 cases a week ago. That is a five-fold increase in a week.

We now have more than 50 States affected—all the States, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Then, we can ponder the fact that the number of deaths has gone up—51 deaths compared to in the thirties a week ago.

So the coronavirus is marching on America and marching on the economy. It is a double hammer affecting families and small business, and it is particularly appropriate at this moment to share with all of you the stories of small businesses in my home State that are being impacted.

More than 40 businesses sent in their stories, and I am going to share 6 or 7 of those stories. But as we think about how we proceed, we need to recognize that this recovery needs to be one where we invest in the foundation of our economy, we invest in the families, we invest with sick leave, we invest with unemployment insurance, we invest by covering the health costs of getting tests and the cost of getting treatment, and we invest in our small businesses.

Not so long ago we had a bailout that favored big business, and big business

went on to make billions of dollars and then get a massive tax break in 2017.

Right now, the airlines are asking for a \$50 billion bailout, but they have spent almost \$50 billion in stock buyouts over the last few years because they were so profitable. And why did they do stock buyouts? Because it increased the value of the stock options of the corporate executives in that industry.

This is a version of private gain and public pain. When a business says, "During the good times I will keep all that money; thank you very much for not charging me any taxes to maintain our infrastructure or our military or our medical care system, and then, when we hit a hard time, we will ask to be bailed out"—so we will have conversations about that strategy for big business.

How about, instead, we focus on the families and the pain they are feeling, and focus on the small businesses and the challenges they are facing?

We need a Main Street recovery, not a Wall Street bailout. We need an economy rebuilt from the bottom up, not from Wall Street down—small businesses, like Bargaritas, a small Mexican restaurant in Ontario, OR. It is a great place for people to gather for a meal, and unlike nearby fast food restaurants, they aren't known for their takeout.

But to combat the virus, the State of Oregon has shut down sit-down restaurants and asked them to go to takeout only. Well, that is taking a toll on Bargaritas. When a couple came recently in the door and sat down for a meal, the restaurant staff had to explain that they could make their meal for them, but they would have to make it to go. The couple got up, and they didn't order to go. They walked out the door.

The owner of Bargaritas notes that they are just struggling to keep their restaurant open, that business is not coming in enough to pay the workers. So if things don't pick up quickly, he is going to have to close and ask his employees to file for unemployment.

Or how about the Paddington family of stores in Ashland, OR, in business since 1973? In recent years they have endured all kinds of challenges, including a couple of summers in which wildfire smoke created major challenges for the businesses in Ashland, OR. But things were looking pretty good this year. Business was going OK.

Now, however, the owner says they "felt [their] world crumble in March with the threat of the coronavirus changing our world." They have laid off eight staff members just this week. That is 30 percent of their staff. In a single day, their sales dropped 50 percent. As things are going now, they will need to lay off more staff within the next few weeks if the business climate does not change.

And the story is much the same for the retailers throughout the town of Ashland, OR.

The story is similar in Portland, where Betsy and Iya, a company that has designed and manufactured jewelry for the past 12 years and regularly employs about 17 workers, had to downsize. They had to ask three of their workers to be let go.

This is a business that has gone out of its way to promote other local businesses, but sales have dropped off very quickly. I would presume that in this sense of crisis, families are buying essentials, and that means those in the jewelry industry are seeing their sales drop. The sales have dropped very quickly, and they are seeing the virus's huge economic impacts, and they are expecting to have to lay off more people soon, and they are looking for help.

Ultrazone Laser Tag—now, you might think that, with folks being out of work, they might go to a place to get some exercise and have some recreation, and a sense of separation might be OK. Maybe laser tag would see an upsurge in sales—not the case. Lee Sturman, of Ultrazone Laser Tag, in Milwaukie says:

My name is Lee Sturman, and I am the owner of Ultrazone Laser Tag, a family entertainment center located in Milwaukie, Oregon. As the founder, I have successfully operated for 26 years. During this time, like all small business owners, I have battled competitors and overcome other challenging obstacles. On a level playing field, I have managed to survive and thrive. But, unfortunately, my business has been upended by an invasion of tiny microbes. COVID-19 has struck fast and struck hard. In a matter of two weeks, Ultrazone has gone from busy crowds to near emptiness.

Steve and Kristi Ball operate Basin Indoor Gardening in Klamath Falls, OR. In response to the Klamath County Chamber of Commerce collecting stories of the financial impact that COVID-19 is having on local businesses, they submitted the following and appreciate the opportunity to share, and I appreciate the fact that they responded and are sharing. Steve and Kristi note:

[They have] owned a small retail business in downtown Klamath Falls for nearly 11 years so have experience with seasonal fluctuations and customer trends that affect the cash flow and overall revenues of my store. Things have been shockingly slow since the beginning of March but especially this last week where customer traffic has almost halted. Based on last years total for March and daily sales compared to this years same time frame my store gross sales are down to about 36% of normal, indicating 64% loss in revenues. I hope this is a short lived situation and business can go back to what is normal, more than a month like this will force some difficult decisions for the future of my store.

April Severson of Portland writes:

I've owned my event production company for 20-years. My business has always had it's ups and downs but this is the first time I've had all of my contracts cancelled. I am the sole employee of my company however, my cancelled contracts have also cancelled the work for my associates and vendors in audio-visual, entertainment, decor, furniture rentals, floral and catering. Since most of my vendors are small and emerging businesses

as well this has had a spiraling effect on our ability to pay for bills, insurance, mortgages and to take care of our families.

Amy Baker is the owner of Thread Bare Press in Eugene, and she notes:

My screen printing business relies primarily on schools, restaurants and events to keep our T-shirt presses running. On Friday March 13th as the stock market tanked and major cultural centers shut down across the country, I saw a third of our monthly revenue vanish in one day. In the five days since, my email inbox has remained empty as our client base struggles to shore up their expenses. I have laid off half of my six staff this week and have let the rest know that next week they will temporarily not have a job. It's hard to feel like so many people depend on me for their paychecks, let alone my own children that depend on me for our own livelihood. I have helped my staff apply for unemployment, but there is no unemployment for business owners. We are a small business that essentially lives week to week based on our clients. In a perfect world there would be money to pay my staff paid leave or savings to sustain myself while we close our doors for what I estimate to be a month. However, we are not in that position. What I'm hoping for is to ride out this storm with forgiveness on my own bills and expenses that will not get paid next month. I'll need emergency, low interest capital to get back to work and bring my staff back on.

Then we have all of our State's music venues, like Mississippi Studios and the historic Liberty Theater in Astoria and the Ashland Shakespeare Festival in Ashland. All of them are in danger of going out of business. With social distancing and prohibitions on large gatherings and a sudden cancellation of musical acts, the venues are experiencing a sudden and total loss of income.

Those stories are representative of things happening all over my State and I know in every State of the United States of America. The economy is imploding, and with each and every small business that can't pay its bills, it affects other small businesses and other larger businesses. It affects those who have rental housing and those who have mortgages. All of us are going to be touched.

That is why it is going to be so important that we turn to this third stage of response by the U.S. Senate. The first stage was to shore up the healthcare industry. The second stage was some immediate help with sick leave and unemployment insurance and food assistance and free testing for the coronavirus. That bill inexplicably has been sitting untended in this Chamber. Why aren't all 100 of us here debating it before the American people and voting on it?

I am told now that maybe, possibly, the bill may come to the floor this afternoon; that some deal will be worked out. Wouldn't it be better that we actually be on the floor talking about it, discussing it, and voting on amendments, if necessary? In a perfect world, I would like to pass it just the way the House sent it to us and get it into law immediately. The President has signed on, the House has signed on. You have Republican leadership and

Democratic leadership. Why is this Chamber not acting?

Then we must immediately go to this broader strategy—the stimulus to support our economy through this collapse to try to keep the collapse from being as severe and shortening the period before it can be restored. That period is going to depend a lot on how successful we are at interrupting the course of this disease. That is why this is so important—social distancing is so important. We have to stop the disease from moving from one person to another. The disease is on the march against America, and we have to interrupt it. We have to bring it to a standstill.

Meanwhile, we have to help those families and businesses being so profoundly affected across America. Let's rebuild this economy from the bottom up, paying attention to the impact on families and the impact on our small businesses. As John F. Kennedy once put it, "In a time of domestic crisis, men of goodwill and generosity should be able to unite regardless of party or politics." That is what we did after 9/11. That is exactly what must happen today.

Let us not be moved by the powerful and the wealthy to give yet more wealth and power to them. Let us be moved by the fact that we are all Americans in this together. Let us tend to the fundamental needs of healthcare and housing and education and, most importantly, good jobs as those jobs disappear across America.

Let's pay attention and work together to shore up small businesses with low-interest loans and with grants to see them and their employees through this difficult time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

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Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, thank you. I want to thank my colleague from Oregon for his big heart and his compassion, continually always worrying about those being left behind and forgotten. I can assure you that Mr. MERKLEY does not leave anybody behind, and he never forgets those who are in need of help.

Let me just say, in speaking about what we are dealing with, unlike anything we have ever seen in my lifetime and most people's lifetimes, up until a couple days ago, my State of West Virginia felt like we were immune. There were no cases reported, and we were like an island in a sea of infestation around us. I knew that was not the case. Many people did not know that we were just not testing and the amount of tests were just not out there, so people had a false sense of hope and security.

That has been shattered. We have our first case now. I am praying to the good Lord we don't have many more, but I suspect because of the fragility of our citizens and the elderly population that we have, those who have done