

vote today at this time, I would vote no, not to proceed. We will stay here all night long. They are worried about what happens when the markets open in the morning. We will work around the clock. I am fine. I can stay here until 7, 8 o'clock. We can all work around the clock, but there has to be a balanced approach and putting healthcare first.

RECESS

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 5 p.m. today.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 3:18 p.m., recessed until 5:02 p.m. and was reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mrs. LOEFFLER).

MIDDLE CLASS HEALTH BENEFITS TAX REPEAL ACT OF 2019—Motion to Proceed—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

CORONAVIRUS

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, the United States is facing a crisis unlike any other in our recent history. This is no time for partisanship or for political differences to prevent us from coming together and working in the best interests of the American people.

The coronavirus pandemic has arrived on our shores, and it is growing exponentially, sickening our people and devastating our economy. As of today, more than 26,700 Americans have tested positive for the virus, and 340 people have died, while 176 have recovered. In my home State of Maine, there are now 89 cases in 8 different counties.

Hospitals, doctors, and nurses are struggling to triage the influx of patients. Nursing homes are locking down their facilities in an attempt to safeguard their vulnerable residents.

Students and teachers have had to transition abruptly to online learning as schools have closed across the Nation. Parents have been left with no childcare. Workers have been laid off or fear that they may soon lose their jobs as the outbreak worsens.

To help mitigate the spread of this dangerous virus and protect those who are at highest risk, Americans have stepped forward to take the proper precautions and to follow the guidelines that are issued by the Centers for Disease Control.

Although measures such as limiting large social gatherings and reducing nonessential travel are important to help contain the coronavirus and reduce contagion, they are also taking a tremendous toll on our economy. There are 30 million small businesses in the United States. They employ nearly 60 million Americans, about half of our Nation's workforce. According to a recent survey, 96 percent of small business owners say they have already been

affected by the coronavirus—not in the sense that they have become ill with it, but their customer base has simply dried up—and 51 percent say they will only be able to keep open for up to 3 months if the economic consequences continue. The potential loss of more than half of our Nation's small businesses, and the impact on the millions of people they employ is simply unacceptable.

In my State the number of claims for unemployment filed in a span of just 3 days this month was nearly double those filed in all of March 1 year ago. Maine is on track to surpass the highest weekly total of unemployment claims since the great recession of 2008. The situation is dire, and it is only going to get worse unless we act and we act now.

We must come together as Republicans and Democrats in this Chamber and in the House to provide relief to the American people to ensure that workers continue to receive paychecks or other forms of assistance. Of course, we continue to build on the two bills that we have already passed to protect the health and safety of the American people.

Looking beyond the statistics that I just recited, the real world effect of this economic devastation is evident everywhere. I just got off the phone from talking to a couple in Lewiston, ME, Jimmy and Linda Simones. They run a third-generation family diner. It is well known and a favorite place to stop by for lunch. They tried to convert to a takeout business, but it just didn't work. So for the first time ever in this diner's history, the Simones family is forced to close their doors and to lay off their workers—workers who have been with them for years, workers who include not only themselves but their son George.

Every day I have heard from small business owners who are anxious about the future of their businesses and how they can continue to pay their employees who are often their family members, their friends, and their neighbors. The last thing they want to do is to lay off their employees and shut their doors, but they fear they may have no other choice. They simply do not have the cash flow, the revenue coming in the door, to allow them to remain open.

The tourism sector, which is so critical to jobs in Maine, has been particularly hard hit. A small hotel in Brunswick, ME, received 84 cancellations within 24 hours of the local college suspending its in-person classes. A well-known Irish pub in Bangor, ME, had to close for St. Patrick's Day, probably its biggest day of the year, and has been forced to lay off 60 people. A charter bus company based in Lewiston lost \$400,000 in 3 days because two major tours canceled. If tourism is further reduced, this bus company predicts losses of more than \$1 million.

Countless other businesses in my State—such as restaurants, the lobster

and fishing industries, gyms, B&Bs, gift shops, retailers, and hair salons—have also been hard hit. The hospitality industry, in particular, is at risk of being devastated, as conferences and vacation trips continue to be canceled.

A hair stylist in Biddeford, a good friend of mine, was forced to shutter her shop, and, at the same time, she lost her part-time job bartending when the bar that employed her was also required to close. When these small businesses suffer, it has a cascading effect on their employees, from housekeepers to wait staff, to bartenders, to fishermen, to drivers, to retail clerks. These are just some of the countless examples of the economic damage that is occurring in every community because of the virus and through absolutely no fault of the small businesses or their workers. But for the coronavirus and the steps that State and local governments have taken, as well as the Federal Government, these businesses would be thriving. In Maine, they would be beginning to start staffing up for the summer months for the height of the tourism season.

It is essential that Congress act immediately without partisan bickering, without delay—act immediately to protect the paychecks and to provide other relief to supplement the earlier bills that we have passed.

I am pleased to report that help is on the horizon for small businesses and their workers that would allow them to weather the current storm. As a member of the Small Business Task Force, I have been working very closely night and day with a group of my colleagues—Senator RUBIO, Senator CARDIN, and Senator SHAHEEN. Our staffs have worked literally through the night on legislation to provide relief to small businesses and their employees.

The Keeping Workers Paid and Employed Act that I authored with Senator RUBIO, the chairman of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, provides a plan to do just that. Through our negotiations with Senator SHAHEEN and Senator CARDIN, who have been wonderful partners—wonderful partners—we have produced, jointly, a \$350 billion plan that would help mitigate this crisis.

Our group has worked night and day in a bipartisan fashion. We have kept in mind the common goal of protecting those employees who have been laid off or who are at risk of being laid off because of the cashflow problems of their employers, problems that these small businesses did not create but, rather, are a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our joint vision is to help small businesses and their employees make it through to the other side of this crisis by providing cashflow assistance quickly to employers who agree to keep their workers on the payroll. This would allow employers to stay in business and keep paying their employees.

More than 100 Maine small businesses and the Maine Chamber of Commerce