

also announced the Testing Blueprint, which is a partnership to help States build out their testing capabilities.

In my State of Georgia, Governor Kemp has partnered with our universities and private companies to expand testing capabilities, and that is now at record levels. Anyone who thinks they may have the virus can use an app developed by Augusta University to screen their symptoms and schedule a test at one of the 66 testing centers in our State.

Testing is a key component to restarting our economy safely, but we must start to adapt to this new reality now. Before this pandemic hit, we saw job creation and opportunity that lifted up all Americans. The four pillars I have outlined are critical to reigniting our economic engine. The USA Rise Plan offers solutions to grow our economy without unnecessarily growing the Federal Government or our deficits.

Americans want to get back to work and back to their lives but safely. While we continue to fight COVID-19 on the health front, we also must look ahead and make plans to rebuild now. I am confident we will because I know that when Americans unite, we rise to meet any challenge.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, it is good to be back in session. After 6 weeks away from this place, it is good that we are all together working on some very important things.

In the past 6 weeks, since we haven't been here in session working together, a lot has changed. America has been overtaken, really, not just by the coronavirus but by the economic damage it has caused.

More than 30 million Americans have now filed for unemployment, and most believe we are approaching the highest unemployment we have had in this country since the Great Depression. It is a concern and particularly troubling because, if you think about it, just a few months ago, back in February, we hit a 50-year low in terms of unemployment in this country. So we have gone from a strong and growing economy to one where many people are out of work and many businesses have been shuttered. Some of these businesses tell me they may have shuttered permanently. I hope not, but it has been a tough time. At the same time, churches and schools have been closed.

Some States have begun to reopen their economies, which is fantastic, but a majority of Americans are still living by very strict social distancing guidelines.

I hear constantly from Ohioans about how much this has upended their lives. Sometimes small business owners will tell me a heartbreaking story of how they spent 30 or 40 years building a business, and now they have seen it

devastated. They are in a situation where they have no cash flow and can't keep the business open.

At the same time, a lot of Americans have been teleworking. They have still been working, but they haven't been going to the office or going to the factory. They have been working from home and figuring it out.

Just like everything else, here in the Senate, we have been affected by this pandemic. As I said, we have been shut down for 6 weeks. This started back in March. One of our colleagues actually came down with the virus, but it was really on the advice of health officials and public health experts that we decided not to reconvene. It was probably the safe thing to do at the time.

Again, it is good we are back now. We are back now with the recommendation of the attending physician and other top medical experts. We have been wearing our masks dutifully and when appropriate. We have been keeping our social distance.

My desk is actually over there, but there was another Senator over there, so they put me here, which is good. We have been doing this successfully this week, and that is great because we need to be here representing the voice of the American people.

However, I will tell you, during these 6 weeks when we weren't convening, there was a lot of work to be done too. Yet Congress was unable to do it. Why? Because, unlike probably the majority of the people whom I represent, we don't telework. We work, yes. We were home working hard. But we weren't involved in debates here. We weren't involved in hearings. We weren't involved in debates on the floor. We weren't involved in voting.

During that time period of 6 weeks, by the way, over half a trillion was appropriated. In other words, this body chose to spend over half a trillion dollars—that used to be a lot of money—of taxpayers' money without people being here to weigh in, to vote, to have amendments, or to have debate. And that legislation had to be done because it had to do with helping small businesses in particular but also healthcare providers around the country and getting more testing, which was very important. But wouldn't it have been good had Congress been able to weigh in? But we couldn't. Why? We don't have the ability to remotely vote, much less engage in debate or much less have hearings.

I think we should be able to do that. I think we should be able to meet and discuss things even when we can't physically be here in the Capitol.

REMOTE VOTING

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, a couple of months ago, I introduced legislation here on the floor of the Senate with my colleague DICK DURBIN from Illinois. He is on the other side of the aisle. In a bipartisan way, we said: Let's let Congress vote remotely. Let's

use safe and secure means to do that. The technology is out there to do that. It has to be safe, but let's let Congress weigh in and vote remotely when we can't meet.

These last 6 weeks are an example of that, but it is not just about this pandemic. I have actually been talking about this for 25 years because I believe it is important for Congress to be able to meet when there is any reason we can't come together or shouldn't come together.

After 9/11, a lot of people were more focused on this because a terrorist act—particularly a bioterrorist act—could have the same effect, of course.

There have been periods of time where Congress has not been able to meet here, and there have been other periods of time like during the Cold War, when there was actually a bunker set up in the hills of West Virginia somewhere for us to convene for fear that there could be a nuclear attack. So Congress has thought about this before, but Congress has never been able to put in place the ability for us to vote remotely, for us to have debate remotely, and for us to have hearings remotely. I think that is too bad because we are the voice of the people. We represent individual congressional districts on the other side of the Capitol. We represent individual States here. The Constitution set it up so that we are out here listening to people we represent, and we come here to represent that voice.

The executive branch has its own role, and it is a very important one, but it shouldn't take over the legislative branch role because they are different, and the Founders intended it that way, to have this separation of powers.

By the way, other countries have done this. The United Kingdom has begun to conduct its proceedings remotely. The EU has started to vote remotely—the European Union. There are several other countries that have come up with one way or another to work remotely—to telework, in essence.

By the way, about 14 States have also figured this out so that they can convene meetings and so on, and some of them even vote remotely. So I think it is time to do it.

Last week, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which I chair, had the first remote hearing in the history of the Congress, and it worked really well. We had three witnesses. We had several Members of the Senate participate. The witnesses were all around the country, so we didn't have to call them here to Washington. We didn't have to gather as a group and therefore risk one of us infecting another or exposing us to the coronavirus.

The witnesses were testifying from their homes, from a living room in one case. One of the witnesses actually testified from the cab of a pickup truck because she was at her sister's place

and didn't want to do it in the house. So she got in the pickup truck with her laptop, and it worked great. It worked great. We were able to ask questions and get answers. It worked just like a regular hearing. I was appreciative that the Rules Committee allowed us to do that.

By the way, the technology is, in a sense, off-the-shelf technology because it is their technology. They have it. We didn't have to recreate the wheel. It worked last week. We used it. I think it can be a template for other hearings.

By the way, I am pleased to say that today, I participated in two more remote hearings. Even though we are here in session, we are having remote hearings because it is not wise for us to all gather together with the staff and with the Capitol Police and others. It is safer for us to do this remotely. By the way, both of these hearings went well. One was in the Finance Committee, and the other was in the Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee.

By the way, our hearing last week was online. You can check it out at psi.gov. The two hearings today were both online, live-streamed today. This does not mean that you cut out the public. In fact, I would say it is just the opposite.

During these last 6 weeks, we could have had hearings every week and kept the public informed as to what we were thinking and gotten more input from the public in an official way and in a way that was so transparent that everybody could have been engaged in it, if they wanted to, just like C-SPAN, except it is online. This is something we can now do, and I hope we will continue to do it.

I hope we will be sure that, as we do this, we also take serious this idea of not just having hearings and not just having the ability to interact as Republicans and Democrats but actually have the ability to vote remotely when we shouldn't be here. Again, it needs to be safe, and I think we can do that.

I am convinced that if we put our minds to it, the technology is not the problem; the problem is tradition. I am not against tradition. A lot of them make sense. But do you know what? Tradition around here has changed a lot over the years. There didn't used to be a filibuster, as an example, which is how we live right now, to get 60 votes for everything. That is OK. I am not saying it is a bad tradition to have changed, but the point is that we change tradition here a lot, and it is time for us to look at this.

It is time for us essentially to catch up. Most of the people I represent are doing this. To one extent or another, they are teleworking. Most people in America today are realizing that you can actually get a lot done online, remotely.

Today, I talked to some healthcare professionals who were telling me about one of the rare silver linings in this dark cloud that has descended

upon our country. It is the fact that telemedicine has been proved over the past couple of months to be pretty darn effective. In many cases, it has been used because people are concerned or afraid about coming to a hospital or going to their doctor, but they can get the advice through telemedicine.

I talked to some educators today. In fact, I also talked to the Ohio Farm Bureau today. I talked to a mom who is at home with her kids during the day now because her kids are home from school because schools have been closed. We talked about how much she has been able to learn about telelearning and how there is an opportunity here to do more outside of the classroom. It is not that we shouldn't get back to classrooms—I think we should. I think that is an opportunity for kids to interact, which is important. But we are beginning to acknowledge that we can also do more after school in terms of telelearning. So this is just another example of it.

This is a change that I think must be made to prepare us for the realities of this 21st century, where these contingencies come up. It is a pandemic today. It may be something else tomorrow.

By the way, the way our legislation works for voting is that it is temporary. So I don't think this should be the norm. I think it should be only in emergencies and only when the majority leader and the Democratic leader—so in a bipartisan way—decide it is the appropriate thing to do, and then, under our legislation, every 30 days, Congress would have to vote—presumably remotely—to reaffirm it. Otherwise, it ends.

So it would be temporary, it would be in emergencies only, and it would be up to Republicans and Democrats alike at the leadership level to decide it is time to try remote voting and to be sure that we, as the Members of the people's House across the way and the Members of the world's greatest deliberative body here in the Senate, as we are called, have the chance to represent the millions of people we are charged with representing by being their voice here on the Senate floor.

I hope we can, along with the times, change here and begin to be more effective in representing those constituents.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I am also here to talk today about the work that is being done to help my home State of Ohio to get through this coronavirus. It is a crisis in so many ways. It is a healthcare crisis, but it has also become an economic crisis and a family crisis. It is affecting everybody in ways that are truly heart-breaking for me to see in so many instances.

I have talked to people who have been unemployed for the first time in their lives and have never had access to the unemployment insurance office.

They have been fortunate. And now they have to.

I have talked to people who started a small business and took a big risk to do that. They have five or six employees—it is a family-owned business—and they have been through the thick and thin over the years, but this one has really knocked them out. They have no income coming because they are in one of these businesses that by government order were shut down and cannot continue to serve the customers.

I have talked to hospitals in a rural area of our State that cannot continue to operate. They have about a week left of cash reserves. Luckily, they are going to get some of this funding that Congress just provided with regard to the phase 3.5, as we are calling it, legislation of the CARES Act. But they are really hurting. They have had to lay off more than half of their hospital staff. They can't do elective surgery. They can't have the normal work they are used to because people aren't coming in to see the doctor. They aren't coming into the emergency room.

The good news is, in Ohio and other States around the country, we are starting to open up and doing so safely. We are doing more testing and that is all good. It has been a tough time.

Like so many Americans, I have been on the phone a lot. I have been on the phone pretty much all day, every day, into the night. A lot of what I have been doing is talking to constituents and talking to stakeholders across the State and hearing their concerns and trying to explain what we are doing here in Washington, how it would affect them and their families, and getting their input as to what we should do, but also I have been working with the White House, and HHS, FEMA, the FDA, Treasury, SBA, the Bureau of Prisons, the U.S. Trade Representative, State of Ohio, and others on corona-related matters to be able to help Ohio companies and help Ohio individuals. We have had some success in that. I am proud of that. In terms of constituents, we held seven tele-townhall meetings in the last 6 weeks where we hear directly from people, thousands of Ohioans. Again, there are a lot of heart-breaking stories and also a lot of really inspiring stories about people who stepped up and helped.

One guy lost his job and decided to go volunteer at a food pantry. He wears the PPE, the mask and the gloves, and he delivers food to people who have never had to worry about food security before because they always had a job. Now, they don't have a job and are waiting to get their unemployment insurance, and they can't put food on the table. Some of them feel funny about going to a food pantry because they have never done that before. He makes them feel more at home, he said, and understanding and more welcomed.

I talked to people who are delivering groceries to their neighbors who are seniors and who are more vulnerable. God bless them. I talked to people who