

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