

makeover on our country. They need us to get rid of obstacles that might stand in their way. One such obstacle is becoming obvious.

A second epidemic of frivolous lawsuits could follow the actual pandemic and crush our recovery before it begins. Already, more than two-thirds of independent business owners say they are specifically worried about a legal liability minefield getting in the way of reopening.

Already, lawyers have begun filing hundreds of COVID-related complaints in courts all across our country. This is exactly the kind of hostile environment that could take our reopening and recovery from challenging to downright impossible. So the Senate is going to act. Senate Republicans are preparing a major package of COVID-related liability reforms to foster our economic recovery. This package, which Senator CORNYN and I are spearheading, will extend significant new protections to the people who have been on the frontlines of this response and those who will be on the frontlines of our reopening.

First and foremost, we are going to protect the healthcare workers who have been locked in combat with this mysterious new disease. We are not going to let healthcare heroes emerge from this crisis facing a tidal wave of medical malpractice lawsuits so that trial lawyers can line their pockets.

We aren't going to federalize the entirety of medical malpractice law, but we are going to raise the liability threshold for COVID-related malpractice lawsuits. This will give our doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers a lot more security as they clock in every day and risk themselves to take care of strangers.

Second, we are including new legal protections for the businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies that have kept serving throughout the crisis and for those that will need to lead the reopening.

We are facing the worst layoffs since the Great Depression and a storm of uncertainty for Main Street businesses. Americans want to get back to work, and we need to do everything in our power to help that happen.

Also, K-12 schools, colleges, and universities right now are completely uncertain about the fall. If we want schools to reopen this fall, we will have to create the conditions to make that possible. If we want schools to reopen this fall, we have to create the conditions to make that possible.

If we want even an outside shot at the kind of brisk rehiring that American workers deserve, we have to make sure opportunistic trial lawyers are not lurking on the sidewalk outside every small business in America, waiting to slap them with a lawsuit the instant they turn the lights back on.

Our legislation is going to create a legal safe harbor—safe harbor—for businesses, nonprofits, governments, and workers and schools that are fol-

lowing public health guidelines to the best of their ability. To be clear now, we are not talking about immunity from lawsuits. There will be accountability for actual gross negligence and intentional misconduct. That will continue. We aren't going to provide immunity, but we are going to provide some certainty. If we want American workers to clock back in, we need employers to know that if they follow the guidelines, they will not be left to drown in opportunistic litigation. We are going to make sure it is the trial lawyers and not struggling job creators who will need to clear a very high legal burden.

In addition, I hope our bill will find ways to expand existing protections for the manufacturers of therapeutics, diagnostics, and potential vaccines—things we are urging the private sector to produce as fast as possible. And I hope we will be able to create new protections for other medical equipment manufacturers, as well, like the policies we put in the CARES Act to increase the supply of masks.

So it is all well and good to give rhetorical tributes here on the floor to healthcare professionals, essential workers, key industries, small businesses, charities, and nonprofits. Rhetoric is well and good. Words matter, but actions matter more. Americans on the frontlines do not just need Senators to talk about how important they are. They need action. They need us to provide the same kinds of commonsense legal protections that Congress has enacted a number of times previously in difficult or unusual periods.

American taxpayers deserve these protections as well. The men and women of this country just saw Congress commit historic amounts of their own money to sweeping recovery legislation so that we could help healthcare facilities and small businesses survive the crisis. We are not going to stand idly by while a small group of wealthy lawyers vacuum up this relief money and redirect it into their own pockets.

Strong legal protections are the right move for doctors, nurses, hospitals, schools, and universities; for workers who want their jobs back, for small business owners who are struggling to stay open, and for nonprofits that have helped the vulnerable; and for taxpayers, who want their money to finance a real national rescue and not the biggest trial lawyer bonanza in American history.

Senate Republicans are going to continue to develop this legislation. It is going to be a redline for us in any future coronavirus legislation. The administration has already stated its support for action on this issue as well.

American heroes across our country deserve these basic protections. This Senate majority will make sure they get them.

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. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, no challenge in our lifetime resembles the depth of our current challenge. We have faced diseases, recessions, and natural disasters, but at no time in my lifetime has a public health crisis on this scale been paired with such an extensive economic disaster.

Finally—finally—we are beginning to see signs that the spread of this evil disease has abated in parts of the country—not over but at least the curve is going down. My home State of New York is just beginning to turn the corner, but, unfortunately, there are many parts of the country that have not yet reached their peak.

The unemployment rolls are as long as they have been since the Great Depression. Working Americans are struggling to pay rent and put food on the table, and many have no idea when the next paycheck may arrive.

It breaks your heart to see people waiting for hours in their cars to line up at food banks. When they are interviewed by the press, they are people who never went to a food bank before. That is how deep and troubling this crisis is.

So we in Congress have an obligation to do the Nation's business during this time of crisis, to be focusing on this crisis, to help the millions of American workers and businesses pleading—pleading—for assistance.

The Constitution instructs us to provide for the common welfare, but at this critical juncture in our Nation's history, the Republican leadership, led by Leader MCCONNELL, is ducking their responsibility, plain and simple. Leader MCCONNELL has yet to schedule any legislative business for the floor of the Senate this month having to do with COVID.

It has taken sustained pressure from Senate Democrats to force our Republican colleagues to conduct even the routine business of holding hearings on the coronavirus. We have had a few hearings now, but not many. Where is the SBA Administrator to talk about the problems in PPP? Where is Secretary Scalia to talk about the problems in unemployment insurance? Where are the OSHA executives to talk about how we protect workers from this pandemic, particularly when they are required to go to work? They are not around.

Even the hearings we are having are slow. They are sort of eked out like