

disinformation that I wasn't even privy to serves only the interest of our shared adversaries. This happens to be the behavior of cowards. And, of course, it should stop. As I started out my remarks today, we have seen this movie before. It didn't end well for those who relied on a disinformation dossier in 2016.

Finally, the truth is slowly starting to come out and the FBI, the media, and the Members of Congress who touted the disinformation look pretty bad today. I started out by saying we need to learn from history—I believe it was George Santayana who said something like that maybe 100 years ago—or you are going to repeat the mistakes of the past. Let's not repeat this history. Instead, we ought to be learning from it. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROMNEY). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Mr. ROUNDS assumed the chair.)

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

COVID-19 HEROES

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to talk about two topics today. One topic I was reminded of when I was in St. Joseph and Joplin, MO, over the weekend, talking to healthcare providers and volunteers of all kinds who are trying to do what they can to help us emerge from this pandemic stronger than we were to start with.

Certainly, what first comes to mind is the healthcare workers themselves—the medical workers, doctors, nurses, and support staff whom we have relied on from the very first moments that we began to realize that this virus was bigger than any health issue we have dealt with in a long time. We are still depending on them today. At some point someone can run out of some of the capacity and steam that you have to do the job that needs to be done, but we see these heroes continuing to step up, and some giving their lives.

Billy Birmingham, in Kansas City, was an emergency medical technician. He was with the Kansas City Fire Department, and he died of coronavirus in April. His son described Billy as selfless. He said Billy had decided he wanted to find new ways to help people. So he reinvented himself as an EMT when he was in his 40s so he could help others. He was an EMT for about 22 years.

We see the emergency medical technicians and first responders out there saving lives, bringing people into the hospital who are in a desperate situation, infectious, as many of them can be, and at sort of the height of suffering and unable to do much to help you help them, but we see that happening. We are benefited by it, and we see a lot of sacrifice in the community.

There are people such as Heather Black at the Harry S. Truman Memorial Hospital in Columbia, MO. She donated 623 hand-sewn masks for her colleagues and the veterans at the facility whom they care for. She brought her sewing machine to work so that she could make masks during her free time before and after her shift and during her breaks. One of her colleagues said: You have to be just literally awed by somebody that dedicated to helping people. Remember that she is making masks, and between the breaks she is helping care for the patients at the veterans hospital.

We see people finding different ways of being heroes in their communities. Dozens of people in Cape Girardeau, in May, decided to put a parade together for residents of the veterans home who were unable to have visitors. The veterans got to the windows and the dozens of people came by doing what they could to present a Memorial Day kind of parade. There are groups in St. Louis and other places, but particularly the one I was thinking about in St. Louis. They went around and collected food and personal care items, and they took those to people who had lost their jobs, who were suffering from the pandemic, who were isolated in their efforts.

I talked today to a number of people in the behavioral health area who understand that, at moments like this, people who have behavioral health issues have logical reasons for those issues to begin to pile up on them. You are isolated. You are sick or somebody in your family is sick. You have lost a job or somebody you know has lost a job. And those issues get bigger.

Then we see businesses who figure out how to use their unique set of resources, whatever that might be, to make things happen. When we find it hard to get hand sanitizers, a number of distilleries went into the hand sanitizer business. Anheuser-Busch, which is not a distillery but a brewery, used their brewery facilities to produce more than a half-million bottles of hand sanitizer and then they used their distribution system to get those half million bottles in the communities and places around the country where they would do the most good.

Bass Pro Shops, in my hometown of Springfield, donated 1 million face masks to healthcare workers on the frontlines. From delivering truckloads of critical supplies to simply checking on our neighbors, there are thousands of stories to tell in towns across Missouri and in towns in Georgia, where the Presiding Officer lives. There are people doing all they can to make this terrible situation less terrible and this challenging situation less challenging. We are grateful to them.

I know a number of people have come to the floor today to talk about those heroes and how they serve us.

COVID-19 TESTING DEVELOPMENT

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, the second topic I wanted to talk about is that we spend lots of time discussing what to do in this next phase of dealing with the coronavirus legislation. I want to talk about something we did earlier and the results it has produced.

In April, Senator ALEXANDER and I proposed that the National Institutes of Health create a "Shark Tank" program for scientists to develop new technologies for COVID-19 testing. NIH set up that program very quickly. We gave them the authority and money to do it, but they did in a week what they normally would have done in 6 months. They have been working overtime ever since with the private sector and with BARDA, or the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, to meet the tremendous need for quicker and earlier tests.

The Presiding Officer and I talked about this just the other day. The President is right in his view that some of these tests only tell us information that gives us more data. We need tests that are quicker and have an immediate response. When you go get a test and you don't have a response for 5 days, that really doesn't do anybody a whole lot of good. You have been moving around for 5 days, maybe without symptoms, and you don't know that you are continuing to spread the virus. If you had known in 5 minutes or 15 minutes what it took you 5 days to find out, how many less people would have gotten the disease if you had known what you needed to know when you needed to know it?

We need tests that give accurate results in minutes, that are easy to take, and are inexpensive—tests that may cost from a \$1 to \$5 or \$6, that give you an immediate response. So that is what we asked of this program at the National Institutes of Health to work on, to put together scientists, researchers, and engineers to come up with their boldest ideas.

So far, since April 29, 650 applications have been submitted with ideas from single individuals or businesses who say: I think this would work. That would be sort of the starting point. By the way, a lot more than 650 people had "this will work" ideas, but when NIH sat down and looked, they came up with 650 applicants they thought needed a careful look.

Thirty-one of those projects have gone into phase 1 testing. They go through a process of validation, seeing if the likelihood that this will work is as great as what the scientists, engineers, and technologists who populate the shark tank thought it would be.

NIH announced that 20 of those projects would be considered even more closely over a few weeks in phase 2, and just last week, NIH selected 7 companies that would start scaling up production of their technology. Taxpayers are investing about \$250 million to help those tests get out there quickly. These tests could be available as early

as next month. Some of them are the type of rapid tests that give a result on site.

One test uses a handheld device that can detect the virus within 30 minutes. Another test company has developed a way to speed up lab testing so that labs that now handle hundreds of tests can handle tens of thousands in the same period of time. These kinds of technologies and others are essential if we want to get our society fully reopened.

In early April, there was an average of 145,000 tests a day. Today, we are running about 800,000 tests, but often they are not the kind of tests we need, and they are not the numbers we need. We need tests that millions of people can take dozens of times. We need tests for every person who walks into an office or a factory or a nursing home or a school or a childcare center so that there is confidence in knowing they are not bringing the virus into that center. It is a high hurdle, but I think it is one that we are going to clear.

The HEALS Act includes another \$15 billion for testing to help in our priorities, which are nursing homes and daycare centers, childcare centers, elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. Those are areas where we think the government itself has an extraordinary obligation to make the difference. That \$16 billion, added to the \$9 billion of money for this purpose that hasn't been spent up until now, means that we have that kind of big investment to see that people have tests that work for them and work quickly.

For this to happen, Congress has to act. Congress has to move. We have to be supportive of efforts that get our society back to school, back to work, back to childcare, and back to better health.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

CORONAVIRUS

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I appreciate the remarks of my colleague, Senator BLUNT, and the effort he has made to really focus in on how we can ensure there are appropriate levels of testing as we respond to this COVID pandemic. We recognize that the technologies, treatments, and vaccines are what will get us there.

In the meantime, there are many men and women across the country who are doing extraordinary work responding on the healthcare side, as well as responding as we deal with the economic impact and the economic fallout due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are a lot of challenges—incredible challenges, all over the country—challenges to the health sector, to our economy, and to our everyday life. I think it is fair to say that the last 6 months have been emotionally exhausting for people.

We have heard this before. We are all ready for COVID-19 to be over, but the virus is not ready to be over with us.

We are adjusting to a new normal, and as we deal with it, I think it is important to acknowledge the individuals—really, the heroes—in so many of our communities who have saved lives and really provided a level of care and compassion throughout it all.

Like all States in the Nation, Alaska has been severely impacted by this pandemic. Last week was a pretty rough week for us. We were included among the States with the fastest growing numbers in terms of rates of transmission. Fortunately, that seems to be tapering a little bit right now but only with very aggressive measures.

In my hometown of Anchorage, our mayor has resumed the hunker-down mode for us in terms of restaurants and bars being closed to indoor dining or a recognition that many of the advances we had been able to move forward on are now being ratcheted back. There are also additional travel restrictions.

For us, it is a time of year when our communities all over the State would be welcoming droves of tourists, all coming to enjoy the best of Alaska, but this year, our season is all but eliminated, almost nonexistent. Certainly, when it comes to recognizing the volume of tourists the cruise industry provides to Alaska, those have all been canceled. The flights that people would make to the State have been made more difficult by mandatory quarantine for our travelers. It has not impacted just the tourism sector; it has impacted the oil industry, the service industry, and our fisheries.

As I mentioned, as difficult as these economic times are, the most important thing we all need to be focused on is the health and safety of our people.

I have tremendous appreciation and gratitude for all the healthcare workers and the individuals who work to protect Alaskans on a daily basis.

In Alaska, we are extremely fortunate to have our COVID-19 health response led by Dr. Anne Zink. She is our State's chief medical officer. She, along with her team at the Division of Public Health, has been doing a great job under Governor Dunleavy's leadership to implement and communicate clear public health guidelines from the beginning of this unpredictable event. I think if you have an opportunity to meet Dr. Zink, she just projects calm. She projects confidence. She projects assurance.

She has absolutely earned the trust of Alaskans throughout this difficult time. She has done so not only because of her demeanor but really how she leads. She leads by example in modeling the behavior that she is encouraging all Alaskans to follow. She has probably taken social distancing and teleworking to a new level, as she teleworks from a yurt outside of her family home in Palmer.

She was able to take a small group of Alaskans to some villages—more remote villages in this State with Dr. Eastman from Health and Social Services when he came to Alaska. It was at

a time when most of these communities were very, very reticent—as many still are—to allow anyone in from the outside for fear of transmitting the virus. She not only led this trip very safely, but then, when she returned to her home, she led the example of self-quarantining for 14 days to ensure that anything she might have been exposed to was not going to be shared with those whom she loved. Her priority has been and continues to be flattening the curve, slowing the spread.

We know in our State that we are just a little more isolated. We are more separate. We are more remote. But we know that we are not immune from any disease of this type. That is surely evidenced by our history.

In 1918, when the Spanish flu—the last global pandemic—hit our State, more people died per capita in Alaska than almost anywhere else in the world. In many of our small and Native villages, 70 percent, 80 percent of the population was wiped out literally in a few-day period. It is hard not to think about that when we face this current pandemic.

In fact, Alaska was one of the very first States in the country to put together a coordinated response to the challenges presented by COVID. This was back in January.

On January 28, there was a chartered plane carrying U.S. consulate personnel and citizens from an area of China that had been at the center of the outbreak. That plane landed in Anchorage. The passengers had to disembark the plane in order to refuel. They were moving to California.

We had a situation where there was a pretty quick scramble. Dr. Zink led her team, and they were able to mobilize very quickly and very efficiently to ensure a safe operation that was successful in ensuring the protection and the health and safety of all who were involved. They opened up a terminal there at Ted Stevens International Airport. They created a quarantine unit that delivered not one but two health screenings to over 200 passengers and crew members. It was a pretty extraordinary event that they were able to put together in very, very short order.

Those who were part of that said Dr. Zink's comments on this effort really reflect her strong leadership.

Dr. Zink noted:

It is easy to stay focused on all that we had to do in a short period of time to prepare and respond, but at the end of the day, this mission was about people. It was about American citizens, some of whom were working to serve our country. It was about families, and it was about helping each other in a time of need.

Dr. Zink has been doing extraordinary work as we have dealt with challenging issues as they relate to quarantine after travel, travel restrictions around the States that have been extraordinarily limiting.

She has worked with her team to put together plans of operation and protocols so that our fisheries can be successfully prosecuted, and they have