

many families is Andy Mercier, who leads Merchants Foodservice in Hattiesburg. In partnership with the Mississippi Food Network, his 800 employees have remained on the payroll and worked to provide more than 100,000 gallons of milk and nearly half a million food produce boxes to those in need.

These USDA Farmers to Families boxes filled with food products from Mississippi farmers and producers have sustained families and helped our hard-hit agricultural industry.

In addition to efforts in the private sector, our churches and nonprofits across our State are also working tirelessly for Mississippians. St. James United Methodist Church in Columbus coordinated with a Delta catfish producer to distribute five tons of Mississippi farm-raised catfish to those in need in the Golden Triangle region.

Finally, I could not stand up here today and fail to mention our Mississippi teachers, especially as so many schools across our State are beginning the new academic year this month.

Last spring, our teachers accepted the challenge and quickly transitioned their classrooms to a new kind of learning through technology and other socially distanced means. While those challenges continue as schools navigate how best to serve students this fall, each and every one of our teachers will be in my prayers over the next few weeks.

In every facet of our society, we have heroes standing up to help their neighbors during unprecedented challenges. To all of the healthcare workers and first responders on the frontlines against this virus, to all the researchers racing to test treatments and develop protocols, to all of the people making hand sanitizers and PPE to help prevent the spread of this virus, to all the bankers and small businesses working to keep people on the payroll, to all of our farmers, ranchers, food distributors, and grocery store workers keeping food on the store shelves and on our tables, to all of our churches and nonprofit organizations serving our communities, and to our teachers who are facing challenges they could have never imagined, from the bottom of my heart, I say thank you. Your heroic labors are noticed, and they are greatly appreciated.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

COVID-19 HEROES

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleagues today—the Senator from Mississippi, the Senator from Kansas, and so forth—for coming down and spending just a little bit of time talking about the wonderful heroes we have in our home States, and we really do have so, so many of them.

While the country is anxiously awaiting Washington to come together and pass an updated COVID relief package,

we are truly blessed to have everyday heroes back in our 50 States who are working around the clock to help out their neighbors.

Essential workers haven't taken a break. They have been keeping our country running—and not just during this global pandemic but every single day. I have heard, time and again, stories of Iowans helping Iowans. Folks are volunteering their time and their talents to serve their communities and ensure no one feels alone during this time of social distancing.

When my friend Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds announced that there was a shortage of face masks to protect frontline workers, Iowans, including my own mother, started sewing.

Deb Siggins of Lisbon, IA, has made more than 400 masks that she has donated to a local hospital, her friends, and coworkers, the local fire department, grocery store employees, and elderly patients. She has even turned a tree near her home into a “giving tree” decorated with her homemade masks for people to take, which she is constantly updating. Deb plans to keep making the masks until they are no longer needed because she believes that sewing is her gift from God, which she can use to help others.

Mary Shotwell of Des Moines wanted to give back to those helping her during this pandemic. In “i-sew-lation,” as she describes it, Mary sewed masks for her entire neighborhood and healthcare workers at Broadlawns Medical Center.

In addition to the demand for masks, there has also been an increased need for food, especially to feed our hungry kiddos. Linn-Mar teacher Carla Ironside, who hasn't seen her students in the classroom since March, now sees some of them when they pick up meals at Feeding Lunches to Youth in Marion and Cedar Rapids, where she volunteers. Carla says the opportunity to serve these meals helps calm her anxious mind, knowing her students are fed. She said: “I get to see their smiles . . . and it helps me, and I think it helps them.”

But it is not just our wonderful teachers; students are doing their part too. Allie Stutting of Princeton, IA, who is a University of Iowa student, launched an effort to mobilize her peers to serve and protect those at heightened risk. Worried about the threat COVID posed to her grandparents and the elderly, Allie set up a network of young people called the Iowa City Errand-ers to get groceries and food, pick up prescriptions, and run other errands for older folks and others in need. Allie's idea has inspired an army of over 400 volunteers—yes, 400 volunteers, folks.

The story of these everyday heroes continues. To keep those who are venturing out safe, ambassadors from Operation Downtown are walking around Des Moines, cleaning and sanitizing handrailings, door handles, parking meters, and other high-touch surfaces.

Julie Skalberg, an Operation Downtown ambassador, explains that it is an

effort to help folks feel secure during what can be a very scary time.

Despite the potential risk, Cynthia Allen—another Operation Downtown ambassador—says she feels that it is an honor to give back to our community.

Folks, the actions of these and many, many others like them who are pitching in and doing their part are examples of what I like to call “Iowa Nice.” For each of them, serving others is not a chore but, rather, a gift greeted with gratitude.

At a time filled with immeasurable uncertainty, these heartland heroes are bringing comfort to their communities, including complete strangers, many who are isolated and alone.

Defeating this virus will require the development of an effective vaccine, and Iowa is helping to lead the way in this effort. Right now, the hard-working folks at the University of Iowa's Medical School are working with Pfizer to develop a COVID-19 vaccine. In the annual Defense bill that recently passed the Senate, I helped increase funding for these types of studies and developments.

The efforts of our bright young Iowa college students, combined with the work of Operation Warp Speed and the administration, provide great hope for the future development of cures, treatments, and vaccines. Now, as we wait for the results, let's not forget the hope that the stories of our everyday COVID heroes bring. It is the Iowa way: stepping up and doing your part—meeting the needs of family, friends, and even strangers.

Folks, I have said it before, and I will say it yet once again here today: We will get through these challenging times, and we will do it together.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I have come to the floor again today to speak about an obscure section of immigration law that has a direct impact on the lives of literally millions of people living and working in the United States. I am here to speak about the plight of immigrant workers who are suffering because of a serious problem in our immigration system, known as the green card backlog. Many of these immigrants are essential workers helping to lead the fight against COVID-19. We have just heard tributes on the floor to these healthcare heroes from Senators on the other side.