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House of Representatives

The House met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer: Lord of all creation, thank You for giving us another day.

We come before You again, O Lord, to implore Your blessing upon a nation seeing continually high rates of infection with COVID-19. Our hospitals are near breaking point in the availability of beds for those who are stricken.

Thank You again for those men and women of science who have developed the vaccines now beginning to be distributed. This is a great sign of hope in the midst of so much suffering and fear. Lord, have mercy.

Bless the Members of this House, and of the Senate, as the omnibus and the coronavirus relief bills are presented and considered today. Give them wisdom and generosity; increase their trust that Your people in this Nation will use the assistance coming their way to fuel a struggling economy.

May all that is done be for Your greater honor and glory.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to section 4(a) of House Resolution 967, the Journal of the last day's proceedings is approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ms. JACKSON LEE led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

COVID VACCINE

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I join in the prayer of the Chaplain this morning. I believe it is important to open this day of lifesaving relief with a prayer to ask that our Congress comes together and stands in the face with help on the way to dying Americans from COVID-19, the families of those who have died and those who are on the front lines fighting against this virus.

It is important that we help our schoolchildren with educational dollars and, as well, make sure that the vaccines are going as fast as they can to the sites across America.

I spoke to hospitals in my district, smaller hospitals and community hospitals that are still waiting for their vaccine. We know that they want their frontline medical professionals to keep saving and serving the public.

So this is going to be a historic and important day. We know it is not what we want in complete, but we know we will be working into the new year to be able to respond to the needs of the American people helping our local governments and, as well, making sure that those children who will be returning to school and those teachers, as well, will be protected after they have the opportunity—the teachers, in particular—to have the vaccine. This is a historic day. Let us work together.

RELIEF FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

(Ms. PELOSI asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. PELOSI. Madam Speaker, I associate myself with your comments and those of our Chaplain, Father Conroy, that it is appropriate to start today with a prayer, and every day, but especially a day when we are seeing over

300,000—and the number getting higher—Americans who are dying from the coronavirus.

We have hope because there is a vaccine. We have hope because we have a President who recognizes science and, again, the need for us to distribute the vaccine in the most equitable, fair, and free way. By that President, I mean one who will take office 1 month from now, Joe Biden.

I do want to speak to the bill that will be on the floor shortly. It is a good, bipartisan bill. As different from bills that had been proposed on the Senate side by the Republican leader, it does things that his bill never did, and that is that it addresses the food needs of the American people. Maybe 15 million children are food insecure in our country, and adults as well.

Millions of families are on the verge of eviction, and this legislation addresses the rental needs and the short-term moratorium. We can accept a short-term because we will have a new President during the length of that moratorium to extend it further if necessary.

We also have in the legislation direct payments, which were not in the Republican bill, to America's working families. I would like them to have been bigger, but they are significant, and they will be going out soon.

The President may insist on having his name on the check, but make no mistake, those checks are from the American people. The American people's name should be on that check, no individual, because that is the source of the resources for those checks—tax-paying Americans.

In addition to that, the list goes on of some of the very positive things that are on the bill—quite frankly, some of them did not come to agreement until yesterday—whether we are talking about WRDA, the Water Resources Development Act; a big jobs bill had bipartisan support but some disagreement over language, but by the time

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

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that was resolved, it pushed the bill from coming to the floor later.

We didn't have, at the start of the day, sick leave. That is in the bill, almost \$2 billion for sick leave.

It didn't have the EITC, the earned income tax credit, for working poor people to have that boost, as well as the child tax credit. It did not have the employment retention tax credit—bipartisan support on WRDA and on that.

Then we came to agreement not only on the language, but where that initiative would be placed in that. So many of these things need to be precisely written and assembled in order for a bill to come to the floor, which we anticipate will be pretty soon this morning.

One of the things, though, that is disappointing because, for a long time now, House Democrats and the Senate have been saying we want to crush the virus and put money in the pockets of the American people. The title of our bill before was about honoring our heroes, our State and local workers who are on the front line.

We talk about those on the front lines who are our heroes. They are necessary in meeting and crushing this virus. We are talking about healthcare workers in cities, counties, and States. We are talking about first responders, police and fire, some who are the first on the scene to help someone with the coronavirus.

We are talking about our teachers, our teachers, our teachers, who are the custodians of our children for a large part of the day. We are talking about our transportation, sanitation, and food workers and those who make our lives possible.

I think it would be interesting to point out that, as enthusiastic as we are about the PPP provisions in this bill, and we all support them in a bipartisan way, it is important to note that small businesses—I always say there is nothing more optimistic than starting a small business, maybe getting married—but the optimism, the hope, and the dream that people have is completely, shall we say, darkened by the assault of this virus, and that is why we had to start by crushing the virus.

We couldn't pass legislation until now because the administration simply did not believe in testing, tracing, treatment, wearing masks, sanitation, separation, and the rest—the scientific approach. It has become clear to us now that they believed in herd immunity, a quackery springing right from the Oval Office and not denied sufficiently by some in the CDC and the rest.

Now we have a vaccine, and that gives us hope, a vaccine that springs from science.

People say around here sometimes: I am faith oriented, so I don't believe in science.

I say: Well, you can do both. Science is an answer to our prayers, and our prayers have been answered with a vaccine.

In this legislation, we have a provision for it to be developed, purchased, and distributed in a way, again, that is fair, equitable, and free.

What we couldn't get ever—even with the previous legislation just on top, testing, et cetera—was the adequate language to recognize that this coronavirus has taken a horrible toll on our whole country, more so among people of color. People of color have died from the coronavirus.

A child who was Hispanic had eight times more of a chance of going to the hospital with the coronavirus than a White child. If you are African American, there is five times more of a chance of going to the hospital because of the coronavirus. So now we have a vaccine we hope will reach everyone as soon as possible.

One item that I am heartbroken about in this bill, though, is that, while we make an attempt to crush the virus, we don't do it adequately enough in terms of recognizing the toll on people of color; but we will have to do that in the public sentiment of it, in the demand that we make on Governors and others who are in charge of the distribution.

We put money in the pockets of the American people. We want to do more, but, nonetheless, we are meeting the deadline of December 26 for unemployment insurance, which was vital.

But the third thing, honoring our heroes, as I said earlier, healthcare workers, our first responders, police and fire, sanitation, transportation, food workers, teachers, teachers, teachers, we just decided that, while they are on the front line, while they are risking their lives to save lives—many of the healthcare workers, the police and fire, et cetera, many of them have lost their jobs. Many of them have already lost their lives. Many have lost their jobs.

So why is it that this Congress and this White House refuses to recognize the value, the contribution, and the sacrifice of our, again, heroes, our people on the front line?

It is interesting, I think, to note that, when we passed a number of bills in a bipartisan way—and we will pass this one today—in the course of that, with the CARES Act and the followup on the PPP bill and this bill now, we are approaching \$1 trillion that we are putting out for PPP.

□ 0915

If that is what is needed and is spent effectively, that is a worthy expenditure. Almost \$1 trillion—well over \$750,000. This bill alone, over \$300 billion. So we have PPP.

Now, in order for the private sector to function, in order for us to live our lives, we need to have the public sector: public transportation, public schools, public health, the list goes on.

So it is not about public/private. It is about people, people who are doing their jobs, again, risking their lives to save lives and lose their life and may lose their jobs. Many have lost their

lives. Many more, of course, have lost their jobs.

Madam Speaker, we have approaching \$1 trillion for the PPP; small business, which I support all the way; and \$150 billion or \$160 billion for State and local government, which enables the private sector to function, which enables us to crush the virus, which enables us to meet the needs of people.

Madam Speaker, \$150 billion to \$160 billion versus well over \$800 billion already. How could that be right? Except the Republicans insist on saying: We don't want to give money to blue States where the coronavirus is.

It is in red States, too. It knows no borders and it knows no party, this vicious virus. But somehow, other Republicans have said to our heroes, our healthcare workers, our teachers, our transportation, our police and fire, and the rest—sanitation workers, so important; food, food, food—you are not worthy of support because perhaps you are in a blue State, predominantly, and, therefore, we undervalue your contribution to our society, to our economy, and especially now, as we try to minister to the needs of people in this coronavirus crisis.

How do you think these vaccines come into a State? They go from a lab to your arm magically? No. They have to be received, distributed, administered, and done so fairly, equitably, and free.

Who do you think is going to do those jobs if you don't respect the role of State and local government in all of this? But don't think of it as government. Think of it as people. Think of it as yourself needing all of that.

So I would hope that, as we see the need for what we have done in this nearly \$900 billion legislation that we will vote on today, that everyone understands it is a first step. It is the first step, as President-elect Biden has said. It is the first step. And we will need to do more to get more virus assistance to crush the virus, but also more money to buy more vaccines.

We need to have the Defense Production Act in play to hasten the manufacture of these vaccines, and we need to be able, as I said, to get the job done, and that takes people.

People need to be respected. Their worth needs to be valued, and the entities under whose auspices they work, public hospitals, all the rest, and education, so important.

And yet, many of our teachers have lost their jobs. We need more teachers because we need more space to separate, to, again, protect our children.

We have always said, if we want the economy to open up and we want our schools to open up, you must crush the virus, at least take the precautions so that people are not in jeopardy if they go to work or when they go to school.

Schools should be the safest places in America for our children, and they can be if science is respected and the mask-wearing, distancing, and the rest. But you need more space; you need better

ventilation, as BOBBY SCOTT tells us over and over; and we need more teachers.

This is a big mistake. The Republicans said you can get a small amount, not even approaching in any way, the PPP—again, no resentment there; we support that. But the recognition that that is important should also recognize that the sector of our economy that supports the private sector be recognized.

So, on that score, you come to a situation where, how could it be that we only have \$160 billion for State and local, where we have approaching \$1 trillion dollars for PPP, not recognizing that the private sector is connected to the public sector?

Now, one more point on that.

They said: You can have some money for State and local—we will decide how it will be distributed—if you do surrender the rights of workers.

In other words, just in case anybody doesn't know, there are essential workers who are required to go to work. If they don't because they are concerned about danger to their health and the health of their families because the workplace is not safe, they cannot go on unemployment insurance. And if they go to work and contract the virus, they have no recourse, because that is the way the Republicans want it.

That is the way the Republicans want it: antiworker.

Madam Speaker, just for good measure, they have thrown in certain aspects of the Civil Rights Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, OSHA—the list goes on—in section 42 of their heinous liability bill of all of the actions that cannot be taken.

And I asked one of the Republican Senators: What does preventing the ADA, American with Disabilities Act, to honor its responsibility?

They said: Why not have the Chamber of Commerce call you and tell you.

I said: Why don't you not waste my time or the Chambers' time about why the ADA should not be enforced because of the virus?

This is coronavirus-centric. We said that we can find a compromise on liability for the time of the virus and in a way that is fair to those employers who want to protect their workers and to the workers. They decided they would turn it into some massive, long-term, ever-encompassing liability—just so wrong to work with. That is not what our system is about.

But, nonetheless, I still thought we could try to find a compromise. We couldn't. They were absolute: Just call the Chamber of Commerce. They will tell you why they can't meet the needs of their workers.

Madam Speaker, heading back to the money, nearly \$1 trillion PPP.

\$160 billion—and not even giving the States and localities the flexibility to use the funds for both addressing the COVID needs, the health needs, but also the revenue lost. Even the Repub-

lican Governors wanted that flexibility, but they wouldn't give it to us then, and they wouldn't give it to us now for fear that some blue State Governor or city or mayor or county executive might take advantage of that.

We have never done enough for localities. That is a pitch we have made. That is what we have in the Heroes Act. But there was no market for that on the Republican side of the aisle.

So when we say it is a first step, that is basic. Let us thank God CHUCK SCHUMER was able to dismantle, in part, the Toomey resolution that would tie the hands of a President to meet the needs of the American people and our economy by exercising section 13(3) of the Federal Reserve Board.

Madam Speaker, we got past that, which took a long time. I felt Wednesday night we were finished. This monstrosity reared his head the next morning. Leader SCHUMER effectively was able to fix it—it still should not even have been initiated, but, nonetheless, fix it—in a way that enabled us to go forward. And that is why it has taken this long to get here in these last few days.

Madam Speaker, again, I look forward to NITA LOWEY bringing the legislation to the floor. As the chair of the Committee on Appropriations, this will be her last bill on the floor. In fact, it is the last bill for many of us here, but hers as chair of the Committee on Appropriations. She and her staff—Shalanda and Chris and so many others—and all of our chairs did such a remarkable job, and their staffs deserve so much credit for all of this.

Again, we will do some good with this legislation, but we must recognize that more needs to be done to crush the virus, to put more money in the pockets of the American people—from the American people to the American people—and, again, to fill in the gap that has been purposefully left to honor our heroes with all that.

As we review policy and legislation and negotiation and all that, just always have in our hearts every single one of the people who have died from the coronavirus. It can be stopped. It can be crushed. But that is a decision, it is a decision, and a decision to recognize where it is hurting people the most.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to a strong bipartisan vote today on this legislation, respecting it for what it does, not judging it for what it does not, but recognizing that more needs to be done.

Again, with high praise for all of our chairs, and, again, special recognition of Madam Chair NITA LOWEY for her last bill on the floor, again, I say congratulations to all the staff who worked so hard.

But it all comes back to families who lost their loved ones, those millions and millions of people who were infected, some more seriously than others. We don't know the after-effects it may have, but we do know that we have hope.

We have a vaccine, and we have a President coming into office who believes in science and cares about people and values the work that our first responders and our healthcare workers, et cetera, do for us.

Madam Chair, prayerfully, as you and our chaplain began, prayerfully, I close my remarks, assuring, for whatever it is worth, that many of us who serve in this body and represent the American people have had a death in the family, because so many people have lost their loved ones, whom we have all lost.

CORONAVIRUS RELIEF AID

(Mr. SUOZZI asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. SUOZZI. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of our bipartisan legislation to both fund the government and for the COVID relief package. As Speaker PELOSI just noted, this bill is far from perfect, but we can't let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Madam Speaker, today, is the darkest day of the year. It is a fitting symbol of the misery and suffering that so many people are facing in our country right now. The effects of this pandemic have been cruelly uneven.

Some people have remained relatively unscathed. Some people can work remotely, still have their jobs, no one around them has gotten sick or died within their immediate circle, while others are awash in misery: unable to return to work, unable to pay their rent, to pay their utilities; people around them have gotten sick.

People have lost their lifesavings in their small business, and many hundreds of thousands have died, including my 92-year-old father-in-law, who, in April, was diagnosed with the coronavirus and died within 48 hours.

Today's relief package—and that is what it is is relief—will provide much-needed help for millions of Americans.

So while today is the darkest day of the year, every day will get a little brighter, and spring will surely follow our dark winter. But we must remember that, while spring is on its way, there is so much more that needs to be done.

Our State and local governments must have relief from their massive loss of revenues. Without our help, police officers, teachers, and other heroes on the front line will face layoffs.

Madam Speaker, we need to continue today's spirit of bipartisanship.

□ 0930

IN SUPPORT OF COVID RELIEF MEASURE

(Ms. LEE of California asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. LEE of California. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of this desperately needed omnibus measure.