

this terrible, unprecedented pandemic, over 90 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured. In the midst of a pandemic, they are not sure whether they can afford to go to a doctor.

We are coming to the close of one of the most terrible and painful years in American history. That is a tragic fact. Over 330,000 of our people have died of COVID-19, and, as we speak, we are seeing recordbreaking numbers of new cases, and hospitals around the country are being overwhelmed with new admissions.

During the last year, the education and well-being of tens of millions of our young people, from childcare to graduate school, has been disrupted. The terrible emotional isolation this pandemic has caused, where people are unable to spend time with their families and friends, has resulted in a huge increase in mental illness, drug addiction, and even suicide.

As I mentioned, the House has done the right thing. By an overwhelming vote, Democrats and Republicans voted to increase that \$600 direct payment to \$2,000. A recent poll came out, and 78 percent of the American people think that was the right decision. They are hurting. They want help. The leaders of our country—President Trump, President-Elect Biden, Minority Leader CHUCK SCHUMER, the Speaker of the House, NANCY PELOSI—are all in agreement: We have to raise that direct payment to \$2,000.

So that is where we are right now in this historic moment. Do we turn our backs on struggling working families, or do we respond to their pain?

So, Madam President, would the Senator modify his request that immediately following the vote on the veto override, the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.R. 9051; that the bill be considered read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill with no intervening action or debate; further, that, if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection to the request for modification?

Mr. MCCONNELL. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original?

Mr. SANDERS. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, this is our historic moment. We can see the

suffering across our country. We can see how desperate people are. We can see how during this holiday season, the people are looking at the prospect, in the words of Tony Fauci, where the worst may be ahead of us for these families. The worst may yet to have been actually inflicted upon families and our country. Yet the Republicans are refusing to allow for a vote on giving each individual \$2,000 in order to make it through the rest of this pandemic.

Senator SANDERS today speaks for the millions of Americans who are suffering through a devastating health crisis, an unemployment crisis, an eviction crisis, a hunger crisis, and a crisis of faith—faith that their leaders in this country will stand up and provide for Americans in their hour of need.

Meanwhile, we here in Washington must confront a moral crisis: Why can't we keep working families from starving even as we stand ready to approve a massive defense bill?

That is why I am here with my colleague BERNIE SANDERS to call for a simple vote to provide \$2,000 in direct cash payments to Americans across our country. It is this simple. Just like they did in the House of Representatives, the Senate should have a vote—up or down, yes or no—on providing these increased cash payments to desperate Americans. We can get this done quickly and before the holiday if Leader MCCONNELL will simply agree to do it. They already had this vote in the House, and 44 Republicans voted for it. Give the Republicans in the Senate the same opportunity to vote. We already know that many of them have already said they will vote for the \$2,000 if they get a chance to vote. It is this simple.

We can do this because a simple vote will just say that you want to provide a grand total of \$2,000 to Americans who need it to pay the rent, to keep the electricity on, to buy diapers, to pay for lifesaving medication—just to survive this devastating pandemic. There are 44 House Republicans who voted for the \$2,000 checks. I believe that the Republicans in this Chamber will do so as well, and President Trump has already made it very clear that he will sign the bill. So we can see where the opposition is. It is with the leadership of the Republicans in the U.S. Senate.

People across our country are falling ill and falling behind on their bills, and for the families of the hundreds of thousands who have died from coronavirus, the medical and funeral expenses are compounding their grief. They need money in their pockets.

In Massachusetts, this past Sunday, we hit 100 deaths in a single day—the highest death toll our State has seen in a 24-hour period since the very beginning of this pandemic. In the week before Christmas, 21,000 new people in our State applied for unemployment benefits just as Donald Trump let these protections lapse before millions of Ameri-

cans lost their benefits, and that is a tragedy.

A \$2,000 check is the most direct and effective mechanism for delivering economic relief right now to those who are barely holding on throughout this crisis, particularly low-income Americans, immigrant communities, and our gig and service workers—our essential workers. They need help. They have been helping our families, and we need to help their families. Right now, these checks would help 158 million people across our country pay for housing, put food on the table, and make sure that grandma and grandpa have their diabetes or heart medication.

That is why Senator SANDERS, Senator KAMALA HARRIS, and I introduced legislation to provide every person in our country, regardless of immigration status, with \$2,000 monthly recurring payments in order to help weather this storm. We knew then, 7 months ago, that a single \$1,200 relief check was not going to be enough to help families get by, and the \$600 payment in the latest coronavirus package is a crumb to the working people who have faced economic hardship through no fault of their own. It won't even cover a month of rent, let alone heating bills, food bills, Wi-Fi bills for students who are learning from home, and all of the other expenses that are piling up for these families.

Now, some of my Republican colleagues have said that providing \$2,000 would be too expensive. Well, here are some other costs they seem to have forgotten. If our proposal to increase stimulus checks to \$2,000 is soaring, the overall cost of the stimulus bill would go from \$900 billion to \$1.36 trillion. Yes, that is a \$464 billion increase over what we were currently projecting for this bill, but it is only a fraction of the \$740 billion Defense bill that this Chamber stands ready to approve again this week.

I hate to say this, but my Republican colleagues seem to be more interested in funding defense than in funding the defenseless, and that is what this debate is all about. What do we do to help these defenseless families? In this moment of national crisis, we were able to afford spending three-quarters of a trillion dollars on a bloated defense budget—spending that was supposed to protect our country yet did nothing to inoculate against the most profound public health emergency in a century—but we can't give hungry and suffering Americans \$2,000? That is a moral failure for our country. Give Americans this money.

Most of my colleagues support this defense budget. They got to vote on it a few weeks ago, and I know they stand ready to override President Trump's racist, belligerent veto. We are here today, asking the same thing for \$2,000 payments—a simple up-or-down vote. Let's bring the House bill up for a vote. Leader SCHUMER is committed to bringing it forward. We can get this done before the holiday. We can do this for Americans before the year is out.