

We must remember that what makes America the envy of the world is not simply the strength of our defense and military but the strength of our people—people like Ahmed Jaya, a parent of three, who was laid off from his job as a doorman at the Omni Parker House in Boston this past March. Ahmed receives \$400 a week in unemployment benefits, but it is not enough to cover the bills that keep rolling in as he now faces expiring health coverage as well. It is people like Tanya DiStefano, from Spencer, MA, who gave birth to a beautiful baby boy on Halloween, to return from the hospital to find an eviction notice taped to the front of her door. These are the stories that should be driving our fights. These are the people who need relief now. And these checks will go right back into our economy because people will spend this money. They need it for the necessities that are confronting their families right now.

Last week, Donald Trump used these people as political pawns. He stalled signing the coronavirus relief package, claiming that he wanted to give \$2,000 checks to every American. By delaying, President Trump may have stifled unemployed Americans out of \$300 this week in unemployment benefits—benefits that they will not get back. So let's now hold Donald Trump to his word. Let's bring this to a vote, and let's pass \$2,000 relief checks for every person in our country and put that bill on Donald Trump's desk.

This pandemic has laid bare the tragedy of two Americas—one in which billionaires have grown their wealth by \$931 billion over the course of this pandemic, an America where the rich continue to get richer, and the other America that has seen unprecedented economic uncertainty, Great Depression-level unemployment rates, and devastating losses. It is one in which Blacks and LatinX workers suffer disproportionately higher rates of unemployment and their families suffer higher rates of coronavirus infection and death; where workers get laid off while CEOs get raises and companies engage in stock buyback plans; and where residents get evicted or their electricity shut off but major corporations barely pay taxes.

For those workers and families and struggling households in America—for the very vast majority of America—\$2,000 is a lifeline, and it is time for Leader McCONNELL to bring this legislation to the floor for a vote. The American people have a right to know where every Member of the Senate stands on this issue. They now know where President Trump says he stands, and they now know where every Member of the U.S. House of Representatives stands. The American people have a right to know, in this desperate time that we are living through, who was on their side to give their families the help they needed.

Senator SANDERS is right. We should have a vote—it should be yes or no—

and we should do this before the end of this year.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Connecticut.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, America has 600 billionaires. Now, \$1 billion doesn't sound like a lot of money these days. President Trump just signed a bill, begrudgingly, that has \$900 billion in it. But trust me—\$1 billion is still a whole lot of money. It is actually so much money that it is really hard to find words to describe what it looks like, but let me try.

If you are, for instance, one of the half a million Americans who make the minimum wage in this Nation and are lucky enough to work 40 hours a week, guess how many years you would have to work in order to get \$1 billion. Five hundred years? A thousand years? Ten thousand years? No, you are not even close. If you make minimum wage in America today, you would need to work for 75,000 years in order to make \$1 billion—75,000 years. Neanderthals were roaming the Earth 75,000 years ago. Those guys, if they had made minimum wage, would have had to have worked up until present day, every single day—that is, of course, if they hadn't spent a dime of the money they had made in order to accrue \$1 billion.

One billion dollars is a bananas amount of money, and there are 600 people in America today who make at least that amount of money or have that amount of money to their names. That is crazy. With \$1 billion, you are leading a life that, frankly, none of us can really imagine, right? You have private planes. You have yachts. You have household staffs in the dozens. You have enough money to make sure that your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren and your great-great-grandchildren never have to work a day in their lives. Generations of your offspring can just live lives of indolent luxury, without a care, if they so choose.

Do you know where I was 2 days before Thanksgiving this year? I was at Hamden Middle School, in my State, to help hand out free food for the unemployed, the poor, and the disabled ahead of a long holiday weekend. Those long weekends can be really hard, especially the ones that fall at the end of the month when the SNAP benefits have long run out. I got there as darkness fell but right at the beginning of the event. I noticed that down the hill from the roundabout at the school at which they were handing out the food, there was usually an empty parking lot. That night, at that moment, at the beginning of the event, that parking lot was lit up by hundreds of sets of headlights of hundreds of cars that were just sitting there, idle, in that parking lot.

I asked the organizer of the event what was going on in that parking lot.

Was there some other event happening that evening? Why all the cars?

He told me: The cars started pulling into that lot hours ago. They got wind we were handing out food, and they got here early to make sure they didn't get left out. We have enough food for 300 people, and there were 300 cars in that lot before I even got here.

That is what has happened during this pandemic. Millions of families all across this Nation, through no fault of their own, have lost their jobs or have had their hours dramatically cut back. They have no savings because work doesn't pay in this country anymore. They spend everything they earn each month.

So when the economy collapsed, virtually overnight in the spring, they got desperate—really fast.

I want you to think about what it is really like on an hour-to-hour basis when you don't have enough money for food for your family. The decisions you have to make every single day are practically animalistic. Do you make your kids go hungry during the day, when they need the most energy, or do you skimp on dinner and force your kids to go to bed with hunger pangs?

There are hundreds of thousands of mothers and fathers who, right now, as I am speaking, are making that decision today. That is the reality of this pandemic.

But here is another reality: Those 600 billionaires in this country? As it turns out, as a group, they lost nothing—nothing—during this pandemic. No, exactly the opposite. They got richer.

The wealthiest 600 Americans collectively added \$1 trillion to their bank accounts. Let me say it again. The richest 600 Americans gained \$1 trillion over the course of 2020.

Let's be clear. That is not money that grew in their money tree orchards. Yes, we are printing some more money these days, but wealth isn't far away from a zero-sum game still. So when we allow for 600 people in the country to control 50 percent of the Nation's wealth, that is coming out of your pocket.

Six hundred people in a country of 328 million isn't a lot of people. But do you know what is a smaller number than 600? Fifty-two.

There are 52 Republicans in this Chamber—52 people who are going to have a decision to make about what to do in a country where millions are literally starving as we speak, while 600 billionaires count the \$1 trillion in additional wealth that they have accumulated during this period of national calamity.

The question before these 52 Senate Republicans is simple. It is simple: Should we give \$2,000 to low- and middle-income Americans right now to help them survive this crisis? That is the decision Senate Republicans have to make right now. Time is running out.

Six hundred billionaires got \$1 trillion richer this year, and the question

before Senate Republicans is this: Are you willing to spend an amount equal to just half of that windfall to America's billionaires in order to help 160 million Americans?

Right now, the 52 Senate Republicans serving in this Chamber are the only thing standing in the way of \$2,000 being sent to 160 million of our neediest citizens.

The House passed the bill authorizing the checks in a big, bipartisan vote. It is hard to get two-thirds of the House of Representatives to agree on what time it is, but two-thirds of the House of Representatives voted for the \$2,000 checks. President Trump supports the \$2,000 checks, so he will sign the bill if the Senate sends it to him. We can vote on the House bill today in a matter of hours if Senate Republicans agree.

So why isn't this happening? Why didn't Senator MCCONNELL announce the schedule for the vote on the \$2,000 checks bill? Why didn't he agree to Senator SCHUMER's request to bring it up for an immediate vote?

Now, a lot of Republicans are saying they object to the payments because they cost too much and they are going to add too much to the deficit. Well, frankly, spare me the fake righteous indignation about the deficit all of a sudden.

Three years ago, these same deficit hawk Republicans passed a tax cut bill that, before the pandemic hit, had already added over \$200 billion to the annual deficit, and that was a tax cut where 80 percent of the benefits went to the richest 1 percent of Americans.

Warren Buffet wrote in his note to investors last year that the deficit-financed tax cuts earned his empire \$29 billion overnight. That windfall, Buffet noted, "did not come from anything we accomplished at Berkshire." So it is funny: Deficits just didn't matter to the 52 when it was tax cuts to the 600 richest people in America.

But even if this Congress weren't ending in 5 days and we had time to figure out how to pay for it, do you know how we can't pay for it? Cutting foreign aid.

President Trump has been talking a lot about foreign aid in the last week. Now, the money we spend on foreign aid, all supported by Democrats and Republicans over the years, all of it smart investments in our Nation's security—that actually wasn't in the COVID relief package. It was in the annual budget, as it always is. It just so happens that this year the COVID relief package and the annual budget were passed together.

But just for argument's sake, let's say Trump got his way and every single dollar of foreign aid was cut out of the budget. Would that pay for the \$2,000 checks? Not even close. President Trump apparently has an oversized impression of how much money we spend on foreign aid, because our annual foreign aid spending doesn't even equal 10 percent of the cost of a one-time \$2,000 payment to low- and middle-income citizens.

There is also some speculation that Senator MCCONNELL is going to join together the \$2,000 payments with other, much more controversial measures, much more complicated measures, like the reform of our internet liability laws. That is an invitation for this entire effort to fall apart.

The House has finished voting. They have passed the \$2,000 payment bill and sent it to us. They are not interested in taking up anything else. If we start adding poison pills to the \$2,000 payment bill, that is just another way of telling the American people that this body doesn't support \$2,000 payments.

Listen, being a billionaire must be crazy. I make a lot of money as a Senator, but even I would have to work 7,500 years before my earnings equaled \$1 billion. You know what was happening \$7,500 years ago? The Stone Age.

There isn't a good reason to oppose giving Americans who aren't billionaires a measly \$2,000 check to help them put food on the table for their kids in the middle of this once-in-a-lifetime crisis.

There isn't a good reason to choose to make moms and dads all across this country decide which two meals they will feed their kids each day because three meals are not an option. Two thousand dollars doesn't put dinner on the table every night, but, man, going to bed hungry when you are 11—it sucks. And even dealing with it every other night instead of every single night, no kid is going to turn that down.

There are 52 of you, and in the next 24 to 48 hours, you get to decide: Do you protect the billionaires or do you choose to feed that 11-year-old kid? The only thing that stands between the American people and a \$2,000 emergency survival check is 52 Senate Republicans. Got it? Understand?

There is a bill pending right now before the Senate that gives \$2,000 to ordinary Americans. Yes, it costs a lot of money, and maybe down the line we will have to ask the billionaires to pay for it, but the bill is here right now. The legislative session expires in 5 days. President Trump says he will sign it, and all that matters right now is what these 52 people decide.

The House passed the bill with lots of Democratic and Republican support. The President supports the idea. The only thing that can stop \$2,000 payments to struggling Americans right now is 52 Senate Republicans.

Some things in Washington aren't that simple—but this is.

I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. COLLINS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, we didn't expect to be in session this week, but we are. And, of course, as we all know, the theme for this entire year has been "COVID-19 writ large."

More than 330,000 Americans have died from the novel coronavirus. Tens of millions have lost their jobs, and every community across the country has felt the devastating blow dealt by this pandemic, but, as we know, the threats that existed long before this virus still are with us. Even though most of the world hit pause to battle COVID-19, our adversaries did not, and our brave servicemembers didn't pack their bags and not show up for work when everybody else shut down.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, over the last several months, as the Senate has worked to support our country through this pandemic, we have kept an eagle eye on the other threats on the horizon, and we passed the National Defense Authorization Act to ensure that we are prepared for whatever comes at us.

For our forces to continue fighting and defeating our adversaries in every corner of the world, they need funding. They need stability. They need to be able to plan, and they need the unwavering support of the U.S. Congress and all 330 million Americans.

The 2021 NDAA provides that support from Congress. It will prepare our military and servicemembers to address the threats that exist today, while preparing for those that we will inevitably face tomorrow.

Earlier this month, this legislation passed the House by a vote of 335 to 78 and the Senate by a vote of 84 to 13. Those are rare vote margins in Congress these days, and that alone is a testament to the importance of this legislation and its bipartisan support.

We know the President has the constitutional authority to veto any bill for virtually any reason, and he has exercised that power with this legislation. The reasons the President has given I don't think are frivolous at all, but they just shouldn't be tagged to this particular piece of legislation. His concerns about section 230 under the Communication Decency Act and the power of these social media platforms that censor speech is troubling indeed. This is something we really haven't confronted before. We know that under the First Amendment, the government can't censor speech, but with smalltown newspapers and media outlets and other alternatives fading away, more and more the American people rely on Facebook and Google and other internet platforms to get their information, and they have, I believe, become de facto public forums. So I agree that we do need to address section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, as the President has pointed out.