LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I come to the floor today as the Senate works on the next phase of pandemic relief and recovery legislation. The country is united in combating the coronavirus.

The Senate's top priority is protecting the American people, and we are working together to save lives.

America is fighting a war—a war against a deadly disease. There is no retreating, no giving up the American fighting spirit. We will finish the fight.

The key to victory is to control the virus spread until we have a vaccine. A successful vaccine is vital to beat the virus and to return to normal life. The race for a COVID–19 vaccine is as important as putting a man on the Moon. We have made incredible progress. Vaccine development is well ahead of schedule. The administration's public-private partnership, Operation Warp Speed, has started phase 2 and phase 3 vaccine trials much sooner than expected. These are human trials. If all goes well, we hope to have a vaccine ready by the end of this year.

Senate Republicans will make sure Americans have a safe, effective vaccine as soon as possible. It will be the most accessible vaccine in the history of the United States. Meanwhile, we should all do our part to slow the spread, and we know what that means. That means socially distancing, using good hygiene, and wearing a mask.

This is the time for all of us to come together. But instead of fighting the virus, Democrats are waging a never-ending bidding war for more government spending. People want and people need and people deserve real leadership. They expect us to slow the spread of the virus and to protect the vulnerable.

We have made tremendous progress on testing. We have tested over 50 million people already, and we are close to conducting 1 million tests—1 million tests—every day. We also have better treatments for the disease, and we are taking care of our most vulnerable citizens—seniors and people with chronic medical conditions.

At the same time, the economy is bouncing back. We had record job growth in May, as well as in June. That is because the Senate responded quickly to the health and economic crisis. The Senate's historic CARES Act rescue package has helped this country weather the storm. We have come far since the spring lockdowns. Still, some believe that the worst of the virus may be yet to come.

The Senate has put together a commonsense plan to aid the recovery. This week, Senate Republicans introduced a framework bill for the next coronavirus relief legislation. It is the capstone to our pandemic rescue operation. Our plan focuses on getting people back to work and kids back to school and doing it safely, as well as, of course, defeating the disease. The Senate proposal provides even more resources for testing and healthcare. This means more for hospitals, more for treatment, and more for vaccines.

Our package includes over $100 billion for schools to open safely, plus funding for childcare. The Senate plan provides liability protection. We shield the medical community, K–12 schools, colleges, universities, and small businesses from frivolous lawsuits. Our plan includes another round of PPP loans, helping the hardest hit small businesses. We also send a targeted second round of direct payments to individuals. The Senate package extends unemployment benefits in a way that encourages, not discourages, work. We cannot continue to pay people more to stay home than they would make at work. So we end the $600 weekly benefit bonus. That is in contrast to NANCY PELOSI's $3 trillion-and-growing bill, her so-called Heroes Act. Her package actually makes it easier for the economy to stay closed and much harder for the economy to reopen fully.

The Senate is focused on healthcare, on kids, and on jobs. Democrats, it seems, have other priorities—endless bonus checks for staying home, bloated bailouts for mismanaged cities and States, and runaway spending unrelated to the challenge before us.

Pre-pandemic, we had a booming economy. We had record job growth, and we had record low unemployment. We are working to restore Americans' confidence. A solid majority of Americans now say they see their finances as stable.

I urge my Senate Democratic colleagues to come to the table. It is time to find common ground and to finish the fight.

Together, Madam President, we will make sure that America wins the war.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE RESILIENCE ACT

Mr. PERDUE. Madam President, the word ''bipartisanship'' gets tossed around a lot in this town. Unfortunately, we don't often see bipartisanship put into action. However, as we have faced an unprecedented crisis recently, I believe we have seen the Senate prove that it can, in fact, get it done. People can come together, and real, bipartisan solutions can actually happen in this body.

It is actually encouraging to me—and it is simply a function of what I have known since I was a kid—that Americans deal with a crisis better than anyone else. In many ways, we put things aside, and we get together for what is good for the people back home.

Since the COVID–19 crisis began, we have passed three phases of relief packages to help our country weather this COVID–19 storm. In these three phases, we ramped up testing in support of our healthcare workers, we helped Americans who are struggling financially, and we created the Paycheck Protection Program, which has saved millions of jobs and many businesses. Today, as we debate a fourth COVID–19 relief package, it is absolutely critical that we continue to find common ground and bipartisan solutions to bring our country together again.

The Healthcare Workforce Resilience Act is a real, bipartisan solution to a serious problem our country faces today in our healthcare delivery system. This bill is first and foremost a healthcare bill that will help our hospitals deal with this COVID–19 crisis. It is absolutely critical that we include it in the next COVID–19 relief package.

Today in America, many communities are facing severe shortages of doctors and nurses. Particularly, hospitals and clinics in rural areas and communities of color are badly understaffed and are struggling to fill crucial positions.

My home State of Georgia has been especially impacted by this particular crisis. While Georgia is the 8th largest State by population, it ranks 39th in the number of active physicians per capita—39th. Over half of Georgia's 159 counties have been designated as primary care health professional shortage areas. The Georgia Department of Public Health has stated that Georgia's nursing shortage is a full-blown crisis. This is also true in most other States, actually. They have warned that Georgia is not able to recruit the nurses or doctors our hospitals need. But we can change that.

The COVID–19 crisis did not start this shortage of healthcare workers, by the way, but it has exacerbated it dramatically.

Since the beginning of this crisis, I have held conference calls with thousands of constituents across Georgia over the last 4½ months. I have heard directly from healthcare workers who have explained the dire situation they are facing. Nurses and doctors are working longer hours. Retirees are being asked to come back to work. Many healthcare workers have contracted the virus themselves. In fact,