are still struggling with basic necessities. Folks are thousands of dollars behind on the rent and utilities. Their heat, water and power are getting shut off. More than a million Americans on unemployment insurance report that their kids aren't getting enough to eat.

Sometimes the macrostatistics get in the way because the top end is doing very well, the top 10 percent or 25 percent, but so many other people are struggling. And if you just look at a big number, you say: Oh, everything is getting a little better. It is not for the lower half of America. It is not.

I read about one of my constituents recently, Allilsa Fernandez, from Queens, who had a job as a home healthcare aide lined up at the start of the pandemic but couldn't take it because of her family's preexisting medical conditions. Her mother was in the hospital with COVID. Her income went from $3,400 a month to just $1,000.

It was a huge, huge loss—

She said.

I have medications, my electric bill, the phone bill, and [the] other costs. Every day you . . . have to make . . . decisions: Am I going to eat?

In America, that should not be the case. It shouldn't be at any time but particularly when an evil disease has robbed our hard-working people of their income, their livelihood.

''Am I going to eat?'' And we are supposed to sit here and do nothing? We are supposed to say to Ms. Fernandez, and so many like her, we are not giving you the help you need?

Ms. Fernandez hasn't been able to pay the rent since April of last year, over $16,000 worth. And this bill will help people like her, but it will also prevent people from getting into Ms. Fernandez's place: people who work for State and local governments who might be laid off, people who work for small businesses who might be laid off.

It is the job of this government, during this evil pandemic, to assist American families, businesses, and workers like Ms. Fernandez until this pandemic is over. It is also our job to prevent others from falling into the same awful situation that Ms. Fernandez finds herself. It is our job to hasten the day when Americans can go back to work, our country can go back to normal, our economy can come roaring back. We can reduce that awfully high actual 10 percent unemployment. That is what the American Rescue Plan will do.

It will send direct checks to American workers and families struggling with the cost of groceries, medicine, and the rent. The vast majority of Americans will get the full $1,400 we have asked for. It will help reopen schools as quickly and safely as possible. It will help the hardest hit small businesses hang on. It will keep firefighters and teachers and busdrivers and sanitation workers on the job. It will help American families stay in their homes, care for their children, put food on the table, and it will give our country the resources, the vaccination and testing, that it needs to crush the virus once and for all.

All told, the American Rescue Plan will be one of the largest anti-poverty bills in recent history, cutting child poverty just about in half. The entire country has gotten behind the bill: business leaders, mayors, Governors, from big cities, small towns, Red States, Blue States, Democrat, Republican.

The clear majority of the American people—Democrats, Independents, and Republicans—all support the American Rescue Plan. It seems the only group in America who doesn't support the American Rescue Plan are Washington Republicans.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle say $1.9 trillion is too expensive. Well, my Republican colleagues didn't think it was too expensive when they gave nearly the same amount in tax breaks to corporations and the ultrarich in a healthy economy, not one that is struggling.

My colleagues claim this bill isn't related to COVID. What hogwash. It is a strange thing to say because most of the measures in the bill are exactly the same ideas Republicans supported a year ago in the CARES Act, which passed without a single dissenting Republican vote.

Direct checks, in the CARES Act; enhanced unemployment insurance, in the CARES Act; assistance for State and local governments, in the CARES Act; funding for testing and the vaccine, in the CARES Act; aid to schools and small businesses, in the CARES Act. All of them were in the CARES Act, which every Republican voted for, and now they are saying the American Rescue Plan, which has the basic, same structure, is not related to COVID.

When we passed the CARES Act, we all thought that maybe COVID would be gone by the summer. It isn't. We need to keep at it in the same way. Every single Republican who voted for the CARES Act and those ideas a year ago, when a Republican was in the White House and Republicans controlled the Senate, is now saying no, it seems. But now that a Democrat is in the White House, now that Democrats control the Senate, those same ideas, which they supported when Trump was President and MCCONNELL was majority leader, are a liberal wish list—same ideas. Who the heck are they kidding? They have no good answer.

But let's face it, we need to get this done. It would be so much better if we could in a bipartisan way, but we need to get it done.

We are not going to make the same mistake we made after the last economic downturn when Congress did too little to help the Nation rebound, locking us into a long, slow, painful recovery, where it was years before employment was back to where it was before that crisis.

We are not, we are not going to be timid in the face of big challenges. We are not, we are not going to delay when urgent action is called for. The Senate will move forward today with the American Rescue Plan. There will be a lengthy amendment process, as the rules of the Senate require. The Senate is going to take a lot of votes, but we are going to power through and finish this bill however long it takes. The American people are counting on us, and our Nation depends on it.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, today or tonight or tomorrow, Democrats say they will break the bipartisan streak that has defined the pandemic response up until now. They are dead set on ramming through an ideological spending spree packed with non-COVID-related policies.

This is just what a leading House Democrat admitted they would do back at the start of the crisis: Exploit the pandemic as ''a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision.'' To give them credit, they never hid the ball. That is how you get a 628-page bill that costs nearly $2 trillion, but only 9 percent addresses the fight against the virus itself and only 1 percent—1 percent—for the lifesaving vaccines that are ending this nightmare as we speak.

That is how you craft a bill that does nothing to immediately get kids back to classrooms. In fact, that spends only 5 percent of the K–12 school money this fiscal year.

This isn't a pandemic rescue package; it is a parade of leftwing pet projects they are ramming through during a pandemic.

There is a costly ObamaCare bailout that will disproportionately benefit wealthier people; payments to farmers and ranchers based solely on the demographics of the recipient without any regard to actual need; and a massive cash bailout for mismanaged State and local governments, multiple times the size of COVID needs.

Instead of pushing back on the anti-science bullying from Big Labor that is locking kids out of the classrooms, they buy into it.

They want to create generous new benefits for parents who are dealing

with school closures but only if they are Federal employees. To all the parents without government jobs, no such luck.

There are provisions to let abortion providers raid the small business rescue funds that were meant for Main Street businesses.

They want to pay people a bonus not to go back to work when we are trying to rebuild our economy.

There is an effort to create a brandnew, sprawling cash welfare program—not the one-time checks but constant payments—that ignores the pro-work lessons of bipartisan welfare reform and which the White House has already stated they want to make permanent.

The unrelated liberal policies are simply endless. It is like they have forgotten we have a pandemic to fight.

Larry Summers, a top economist in both the Clinton and Obama administrations, says this plan piles way more debt on our kids and grandkids than we need to spend right now. That is Larry Summers, Bill Clinton's Secretary Treasury. Jason Furman, who chaired President Obama's Council of Economic Advisers, said the State and local bailouts are ''overkill.'' These are liberal economists, Madam President.

By one analysis, the Democrats' extra cash bonuses for laid-off workers who stay home will result in almost 60 percent of workers earning more money staying home than they would earn from returning to work—more money by staying home than they would earn from returning to work. What a great idea. This isn't State unemployment insurance; it is borrowing from our kids and grandkids to pay yet an additional cash bonus for not working.

This would extend deep into 2021, when we anticipate serious job growth. Just this morning, we had a jobs report that shattered expectations, nearly doubling the job growth experts had expected to see.

This is what the Washington Post says about this mess. This is the Washington Post about this mess that is before us:

> For policy experts and even members of Biden's own party, the improving picture is raising questions about whether the stimulus bill is mismatched to the needs of the current moment.

That is from the Washington Post editorial.

It is mismatched all right because it was never designed to meet Americans' needs. The goal was to ''restructure things to fit'' their ''vision.'' That is why there was no bipartisan process after a year of completely bipartisan COVID bills that we worked on together. That is why the Senate Republicans who went to the White House to propose working together were told: No thanks; take it or leave it.

This is such a poorly targeted rush job that Democrats can't even settle on one set of political spin. The White House Chief of Staff is going around town admitting that they have written ''the most progressive domestic legislation in a generation.'' That is the White House Chief of Staff. Meanwhile, here in the Senate, Democrats are still pretending this is some down-the-middle proposal and lecturing us for not supporting it. They can't even get their stories straight.

The administration campaigned on ushering in a new day of unity and bipartisanship, but in 2020, under Republican leadership, the Senate negotiated five rescue bills totaling $4 trillion, and none of them got fewer than 90 votes. That is how this Senate was run last year in a time of divided government, and now, in this supposed new era of healing leadership, we are about to watch one party ram through a partisan package on the thinnest margins. Go figure.

Republicans have many ideas to improve the bill, many ideas, and we are about to vote on all kinds of amendments in the hopes that some of these ideas make it into the final product. We are going to try to improve the bill. The millions who elected 50 Republican Senators will have their voices heard loud and clear.

Our country is already set for a roaring recovery. We are already on track to bounce back from this crisis. That is not because of this bill; it is because of our work last year. This is a trend this new Democratic government inherited. We are going to come roaring back and mostly not because of this bill—in fact, in some ways, in spite of this bill. It will be because of the bipartisan foundation we laid last year and the strength and resilience of our people. Democrats inherited a tide that was already turning.

We could have worked together to do something smart to finish this fight as fast as possible. Democrats decided to do something else.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore.

Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1319, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

> A bill (H.R. 1319) to provide for reconciliation pursuant to title II of S. Con. Res. 5.

Pending:

> Schumer amendment No. 891, of a perfecting nature.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Vermont.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENTS

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that for the duration of the Senate's consideration of H.R. 1319, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the majority and Republican managers of the bill, while seated or standing at the managers' desks, be permitted to deliver floor remarks, retrieve, review, and edit documents, and send email and other data communications from text displayed on wireless personal digital assistant devices and tablet devices.

What do we think about that?

All right. I further ask unanimous consent that the use of calculators be permitted on the floor during consideration of the bill; further, that the staff be permitted to make technical and conforming changes to the bill, if necessary, consistent with the amendments adopted during Senate consideration of the bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 972 TO AMENDMENT NO. 891

(Purpose: To provide for increases in the Federal minimum wage)

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I call up my amendment No. 972.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

> The Senator from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS], for himself and others, proposes an amendment numbered 972 to amendment No. 891.

Mr. SANDERS. I ask unanimous consent that the reading of the amendment be dispensed with.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

(The amendment is printed in the RECORD of March 4, 2021 under ''Text of Amendments.'')

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I rise to offer an amendment to increase the Federal minimum wage from a starvation wage of $7.25 an hour to $15 an hour over a 5-year period.

As I think you know, Congress has not raised the minimum wage since 2007. The result of that is that half of our people are now living paycheck to paycheck, and many, in fact, are working for wages that are much too low in order to take care of their families. So, to my mind, the American people in poll after poll and State after State understand that we have to raise that minimum wage to a living wage of 15 bucks an hour. I intend to do everything that I can to make that happen, and I will be offering that amendment this morning.