Senate. This is the kind of bill that we should be working on if we want to help alleviate our inflation situation and improve the economy.

I was dismayed to see that the President's budget, which was released this week, would double down on the kind of excessive government spending that helped get us into this inflation crisis in the first place. After a year of progressively worsening inflation, you would think Democrats would have learned their lesson, but, clearly, the President is still intent on more reckless spending, coupled, I might add, with job-killing tax hikes—and not just any tax hikes. According to Bloomberg, the President's budget would add up to being the largest tax hike in American history in dollar terms.

I hope that my Democratic colleagues here in Congress will decide to skip the President's irresponsible tax-and-spending proposals and focus on measures that would actually help alleviate this inflation crisis, not make it worse.

While there is no easy fix for our inflation situation, we can start to make things better for Americans with bipartisan legislation like the Ocean Shipping Reform Act. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will support the legislation Senator KLOBUCHAR and I have produced.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

RESTAURANT REVITALIZATION FUND

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I met with restaurant owners from all over my State last month—from Seattle to Yakima, to Spokane—and we talked about the American Rescue Plan and how important that was and how that bill made recovery possible for so many restaurants in our State—but not for everyone, and that is why I am on the Senate floor today.

The American Rescue Plan was absolutely a lifeline. It designated more than $28 billion to establish a Restaurant Revitalization Fund that gave restaurant owners the financial support they needed to keep their doors open, to rehire workers, and to deal with the continued effects of COVID–19.

More than 3,500 Washington State businesses have received over $9 billion in Federal loans and grants and debt relief since the start of the pandemic. That is not even considering the flexible dollars that we provided local governments to help local small businesses. Now, that really made a difference and helped a lot of folks keep their doors open and their employees on the payroll, but for many restaurant owners, the funds were gone before they were able to get the same relief their neighbors got.

I don't think it is right that a business on one side of the street in Seattle got Federal dollars from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund but another mom-and-pop shop just next-door and just as qualified—that also got approved—didn't get the money because the funds ran dry.

Now, I know this is true for communities in red States and in blue States—that our restaurants are often the heart of a community. They serve their local favorites that remind us of home. They sponsor our sports teams and community causes. They allow us to get together and share a meal and celebrate with family and friends and make memories. Making these businesses whole is critical for our economy, but it is essential to preserving what makes Seattle ''Seattle'' or Spokane ''Spokane.''

I know many of my Republican colleagues feel the same way. So I want us to look at every possible option to replenish the Restaurant Revitalization Fund and get help to every restaurant that applied and got approved but didn't get the same help as everyone else.

We have got good bipartisan bills to get this done. Our legislation would help hard-to-reach businesses and communities apply for the assistance because I really want to make sure we are helping actual small businesses, not giant corporations that don't need it.

Any Senator who has spoken to local restaurant owners knows they are dealing, still, with really tough challenges right now: increased costs from inflation and shortages of everything from straws to chicken wings, and it is not easy to find wait staff and cooks and a lot more. That is why it is so urgent that we get a bipartisan small business relief package—that makes our restaurants whole—over the finish line as soon as possible. So let's do whatever we need to do to get this done and keep our restaurants open.

CORONAVIRUS

Now, Mr. President, everyone here knows how strongly I feel that we get a COVID supplemental passed as soon as possible. We do not know when the next variant might come or how bad it could be. We don't want to end up in the same position as before, when we did not have enough tests or vaccines or therapeutics. We all know we have to get funding for a COVID supplemental passed and soon.

So let's get both of these passed together to make sure we are doing everything to keep every part of our economy up and running and so that this administration has what it needs to fund every other tool that we know will keep restaurants open, keep our schools open, and every other part of our communities.

I feel strongly that we need to pass both of those bills. So let's get them done together, and let's get it done as soon as possible. Let's keep America healthy and our restaurants open for business.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KAINE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we have some rare good news on the public health front. COVID cases are down at the lowest level since July. Crucially, hospitalizations and deaths are also down dramatically, more than 70 percent lower than they were in January during the Omicron wave. Compared to just a few months ago, our Nation is experiencing far less suffering and death, thank goodness.

But despite the progress we have made, COVID continues to be a threat. Every day, 800 American families lose a loved one to COVID—800 a day—and catch new infections, which present an opportunity for the virus to mutate.

We are at a turning point in this fight against COVID. Now, we need to strengthen our healthcare system. We need to stay a step ahead of this deadly virus. That is especially true since the subvariant of Omicron—BA.2, as it is known—has become dominant in America.

Remember the frenzy last holiday season when we were running from pharmacy to pharmacy trying to find rapid tests for our families or waiting in the freezing cold for hours on end to get a PCR test? Why would we ever want to be caught flatfooted again? We need to sustain our public health funding so that our hospitals and healthcare professionals have the equipment and tools they need to keep us safe.

The one thing dramatically worse than returning to the dark days of COVID–19 and the deadly variants would be to return unprepared. If we want to keep our masks off—and I do—if we want to keep our kids in school—and I do—and our businesses open, we need to make smart investments in America's capacity to confront future strains of these variants. We can't continue this cycle of neglect and panic. These pendulum swings harm our health system and contribute to unnecessary costs and suffering.

Congress must come together on a bipartisan basis. And shouldn't we all agree on this: that we move as a nation in the same direction? That means providing funding to purchase new booster doses, including those which the FDA authorized this week for adults over the age of 50. I got mine yesterday morning. If we don't purchase these vaccines now ahead of time, then we