

Last night, the Senate approved legislation to extend the Paycheck Protection Program, better known as PPP, through August 8th. While we continue bipartisan negotiations on a bill to provide additional assistance to our small businesses that have been especially hard hit by COVID-19 mitigation measures. I very much hope that the House of Representatives will act quickly to extend this important lifeline for our small employers as new PPP loans cannot be issued until the bill that passed the Senate last night is enacted and signed into law, even though approximately \$130 billion remains available for the program.

Let me again commend my partners in this endeavor—Senators Marco Rubio, Ben Cardin, and Jeanne Shaheen—for their continued work on this vital program. Back in March, the four of us formed a Small Business Task Force. We looked at ways that we could help our small employers and their employees survive this pandemic. We put forth a bold plan, the Paycheck Protection Program, to help small employers and their employees.

Our concept, Madam President, was straightforward: provide forgivable loans to small employers to help them maintain that vital connection with their employees so that both could rebound and thrive once the pandemic passes. In some cases, that meant that a small business could retain an employee that otherwise would have been laid off. In others, it meant that the small business could recall workers that had already been laid off, and, in yet other cases, it allowed employers to continue to send paychecks to employees that have been furloughed so that we could keep that link between employers and their employees so that when the reopening occurred, they could be reunited quickly and the business get up and running much more rapidly.

The response to this program has been phenomenal. Since its launch in early April, it has provided \$518 billion in forgivable loans to 4.8 million small employers across the nation. According to an ongoing U.S. Census Survey, nearly 3 out of every 4 small business respondents reported that they had received assistance under the PPP program. In Maine, nearly 27,000 small businesses have received forgivable loans totaling more than \$2.2 billion. Just to give you an idea of how much of a stimulus that is, that's equal to almost half of the entire state budget. That works out to an average loan size of \$83,400, which translates into a small business with approximately seven employees. All told, this program is helping to sustain nearly 200,000 jobs in the State of Maine.

As Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin testified last month, “the Paycheck Protection Program is supporting the employment of approximately 50 million workers and more than 75 percent of small business payroll in all 50 states. This is an extraordinary achievement.” It is indeed, Madam President. It has made such a difference to our small employers. It has kept our small businesses afloat, prevented them from giving up and shutting their doors forever, and provided paychecks to their employees.

Now, Madam President, when we first drafted this program in early March, we did not know how long government-ordered closures would last. In fact, most of them had not even gone into effect at the time that we drafted the law. We also did not know how severe the impacts of these government-ordered closures would be. We did not know how long the pandemic would last. How I wish that we could announce today that COVID-19 had been conquered, that

America's small businesses were flourishing once again, and that the millions of jobs that they provide had been fully restored. Unfortunately, that is not the case. We have a long road ahead of us.

According to a survey released last week by NFIB, an organization dedicated to providing a voice for America's small businesses, half of its members anticipate needing additional financial support in the next 12 months. I fear that if Congress fails to act, despite our good work today, millions of our small businesses will be put at risk and millions of jobs will be lost.

A case study of how the pandemic has threatened the viability of small businesses can be found in Maine's tourism sector. Tourism is one of our state's largest economic sectors. It supports 110,000 jobs; that's one out of every six jobs in our state. In 2018, total tourism expenditures exceeded \$6.2 billion—that's \$7 million per day.

In late March, there was the expectation that the 2020 tourism season would certainly be lower than the norm, but active enough for the tourism businesses to survive. But as the Fourth of July draws closer, near-empty hotels, inns, B&Bs, and restaurants portend a profound and long-lasting disaster as many of our state's seasonal businesses rely on the busy summer season and fall season to pay their major bills for the year, including their mortgage and property taxes, not to mention their all important employees.

Just two weeks ago, a Maine innkeeper in York County told me that her inn would normally have a 94 percent occupancy rate at this point in the summer. She currently has an occupancy rate of 6 percent. As one observer put it, the word "Vacationland" that appears on our license plates in Maine might well be replaced with "Vacancy Land."

I have heard from so many hotel owners throughout Maine, and their stories all have a familiar theme. Reservations made months ago for July and August are being canceled, and cancellations for the fall are also starting to come in. In addition to putting hotel staff at risk of losing their jobs or having their hours cut drastically or not being hired in the first place, the vendors that supplied these establishments are losing sales. Local retailers and restaurants are losing summer customers. Planned improvements and expansions are being postponed, causing harm for local tradespeople. I talked to a restaurant owner who operates a wonderful restaurant in Portland, and right now, she has to depend on outside seating and lives in fear of a bad storm where people aren't going to be able to eat outside. Only slowly is Maine allowing in-restaurant eating to resume in the most populous parts of our state. And all of us understand that we have to put the health of people first, but these restaurant owners are getting desperate, and they are trying very hard to comply with all the CDC regulations.

There's no doubt that similar disruptions are occurring across the country. And that's why it's so important that we reach bipartisan agreement to allow those small businesses that have been especially hard-hit by the pandemic to receive an additional forgivable loan. As we continue our bipartisan negotiations on such a plan, I've come to the floor to outline some of my own priorities for a second Paycheck Protection Program loan.

First, I do believe that we will achieve bipartisan agreement to allow the hardest hit small employers—those that have seen their revenues decline by 50 percent or more in any quarter this year compared to the same quarter last year—to receive an additional PPP loan. This is absolutely essential to the ability of these businesses to survive as the fight against COVID-19 continues.

Second, because we must stretch the \$130 billion that remains in the PPP funds as far as we possibly can, I support generally limiting eligibility to entities that have 300, rather than 500, or fewer employees, with a special provision for seasonal employees.

Third, I believe that we need to expand forgivable PPP expenses in some common sense ways. For example, we should allow forgiveness for supplier costs and investments in facility modifications and personal protective equipment that employers are buying to protect their employees and their customers, such as Plexiglas shields, patio installations for outdoor dining, masks, gloves, that kind of equipment. It's especially important to restaurants facing dining restrictions and those struggling to get the high quality food supply that they need. We should also clarify that employer-provided group health benefits are included in forgivable payroll costs.

Fourth, we should extend the PPP to small 501(c)(6) organizations that are not lobbying organizations. I'm talking about local chambers of commerce, economic development associations, and boards of trade, which are doing a great job but are struggling to survive themselves.

Fifth, we should clarify in statute that forgivable loan funds can be spent through December 31 and allow borrowers to apply for loan forgiveness at the time of their choosing after eight weeks from loan origination.

Finally, to ensure transparency in the PPP loan program, we should require the Small Business Administration to comply with data and information requests from the Government Accountability Office or federal Inspectors General within 15 days.

Madam President, there are many other ideas that the four of us who are members of the Small Business Task Force are taking a look at, but today, I just wanted to outline for my colleagues some ideas that I'm particularly interested in including in this bill.

As the shut downs have grown longer, it has become clear that millions of small employers need additional help if they are to keep their heads above water and survive. It also has been clear that these employers, many of them, must make substantial investments to modify their operations to protect their employees and customers to mitigate the spread of the COVID virus. Most of all, we need to always keep in mind that we are talking about employees. It is the small businesses of our country that employ the majority of the people who are working.

We're close to reaching a bipartisan agreement, and I know we're going to be working very hard over the recess to do so. And I also know that for small businesses that are struggling, such an agreement cannot come soon enough.

Again, I want to thank my colleagues, Senator Marco Rubio, Senator Ben Cardin, Senator Jeanne Shaheen, for their dedication and good faith efforts to reach an agreement.