

RESCUE

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Officials put the price tag at nearly \$1.4 trillion and said with other measures from the Federal Reserve it could pump \$2 trillion into the U.S. economy.

“Everybody’s working hard and they want to get to a solution that’s the right solution, I think we’re very close,” Trump said at Saturday’s briefing, striking a confident tone about the nation’s ability to defeat the pandemic soon.

On Capitol Hill, the Senate convened the rare weekend session as negotiators raced to draft the package. The Senate’s goal is to hold an initial vote today and win Senate passage on Monday.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said that negotiators are making “important progress,” but urged talks to wrap up.

“It’s time to come together,” he said.

The urgency to act is mounting, as jobless claims skyrocket, businesses shutter and the financial markets are set to re-open Monday eager for signs that Washington can soften the blow of the health care crisis and what experts say is a looming recession.

Trump has largely stayed out of the details, but said Saturday that he

would be lobbying the lead negotiators.

On one topic, Trump appears to be agreeing with Democrats as Washington tries to steer clear of the politically toxic bailouts from the last economic crises.

Trump expressed a clear distaste for any industry, including the airlines, that would use federal assistance to buy back its own stock in an effort to increase profits. Banning stock buy-backs is one of Democrats’ top business priorities in the emerging package.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and other top White House officials were on Capitol Hill for a second day of nonstop negotiations. But no announcement was expected.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who has been in talks with Mnuchin, was returning to Washington on Saturday.

Negotiations are focused on providing direct relief to Americans, with one-time checks of \$1,200, as well as ongoing payroll support and enhanced unemployment benefits for the newly out of work.

Talks are also focused on loans to airlines and other industries blindsided by the crisis, as well as possible aid to the states and billions for hospitals and health care providers on the frontlines of the pandemic.

The emerging package builds on a GOP proposal but Democrats push for



President Donald Trump speaks Saturday during a coronavirus task force briefing at the White House. He is flanked by Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, left, and Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Dr. Anthony Fauci. [AP PHOTO/PATRICK SEMANSKY]

add-ons, including food security aid, small business loans and other measures for workers.

“We’re making very good progress,” Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said late Saturday. “We’re going to continue working through the night.”

On Saturday, Trump opened the daily virus briefing with a roll call of his administration’s accomplishments, a week-in-review meant to rebut criticism that the White House was moving too slowly to combat the crisis.

The president pushed back against accusations that he was sluggish to act for fear of upsetting China, though he told aides last month that he had not wanted to alienate Beijing by criticizing its secretive handling of the initial outbreak.

Trump did not lose his temper, as he did the day before. But mixed, vague

messaging still ruled the briefing.

For example, as hospitals across the nation report a dire shortage of supplies to care for an expected surge of patients, Vice President Mike Pence said the government was completing a half-billion-dollar order for masks. But none of the government officials at the briefing could suggest when the masks would reach medical facilities, a moment of confusion that caused Trump to grow visibly frustrated.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government’s top infectious disease expert, tried not to over-promise the effectiveness or speed of medication that could possibly be used to treat the virus. After Trump had exited the briefing room, Fauci answered a question about Trump’s tweet about the drugs by saying, “I’m not totally

sure what the president was referring to.”

Trump also sowed confusion about his use of the Defense Production Act to force American businesses to manufacture needed medical supplies, saying that while he invoked the act this week, he has not yet needed to utilize it to compel businesses to mobilize, despite the pronounced supply shortage.

Pence announced that, out of an abundance of caution, he and his wife, Karen, would be tested for the virus later Saturday after a member of the vice president’s staff had tested positive for the new coronavirus. Those test results came back negative.

The vice president said the staffer, who did not have close contact with either the president or vice president, was doing well. Still, Pence stood just a few feet from Trump at the podium.

The emerging rescue plan from Congress would be a striking intervention at enormous cost being crafted with a speed unseen since the 2008-09 financial crisis and recession.

It builds on Trump’s request for Congress to “go big.”

A central element is now \$350 billion for small businesses to keep making payroll. Companies with 500 or fewer employees could tap up to \$10 million in forgivable small business loans to keep paychecks flowing.

That’s on top of a proposal for one-time checks to all Americans, \$1,200 per individual, \$2,400 for couples, cut off at higher incomes.

Democrats are pushing for increased eligibility for unemployment insurance for those who jobs are simply disappearing.

For industry, the initial GOP plan called for \$208 billion in loans to airlines and other industries, which would have to be repaid.

Negotiators are still hammering out whether there will be money to the states, whose governors have requested billions, as well as how much will be going to hospitals and health care providers.

Trump acknowledged the outbreak was hurting his family’s business of hotels and country clubs but said he did not know whether his business would be one of the many to seek government assistance.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes only mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

The vast majority of people recover from the new virus. According to the World Health Organization, people with mild illness recover in about two weeks, while those with more severe illness may take three to six weeks to recover.

HELPING

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redirect their political contributions to the cause and inspiring business owners to share proceeds from their merchandise.

Volunteers from Calvary Christian Center in Ormond Beach are driving into the area’s poorest neighborhoods this week to give away pre-packaged food to kids who can’t get to the 20 schools launching a free lunch program.

As quickly as the coronavirus has swept around the globe, efforts to help those impacted by it are spreading almost as swiftly throughout Volusia County.

A lot of the help is spontaneously popping up without organized coordination, but it’s all woven together by the shared goal to ward off disaster for those who will be hit hardest by the virus almost no one had even heard of until early this year.

Local governments are using their emergency powers to contain the spread as much as they can with things like crowd size limitations, building closures and event cancellations. And a vast array of individuals and organizations are gearing up to deal with the surge of infections expected to hit in the coming weeks — as well as the devastating economic aftermath sure to follow.

“We’re on the phone daily with the city and county,” said Nancy Keefer, president and CEO of the Daytona Regional Chamber of Commerce. “We’re talking about what happens after this.”

The conversation is also about what can be done to help businesses right away, such as giving leeway on payments for business licenses and utilities.

“They need us more than ever,” Keefer said of the local businesses that make up the chamber’s membership.

A lot of people aren’t waiting for a local government or agency to

help them. A Pelican Bay neighborhood woman posted on that area’s Nextdoor app that she could help people struggling with childcare as school closures drag on.

There’s a Facebook Group called Community In The Time of Quarantine. Small businesses have been invited to post plugs for themselves to drum up support. Information about which businesses have toilet paper, and hours for senior citizen-only shopping have been shared.

Houses of worship such as Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Daytona Beach have parishioners shopping for people who can’t go out. The church’s pantry is running low, so a large box has been placed outside its main entrance where people can donate food.

On the west side of Volusia County, most pantries have shut down to protect the health of volunteers. One of the few still open is at the Neighborhood Center of West Volusia, which allowed people to donate and pick up food from their cars last week.

Our Lady of Lourdes Pastor Phil Egitto is bracing for widespread suffering and illness in the community.

“It’s cataclysmic,” Egitto said. “It’s going to be bad.”

Cavalry Christian Center is getting ready to help when the tidal wave of need rolls in. The church is giving away two weeks worth of groceries to 300 families on Monday, and will offer hot meals in boxes starting Tuesday.

County agencies that have always been in the business of helping are also taking things up a notch.

“Our 211 help line has had a major influx of calls with people looking for childcare, food, information about COVID-19,” said Courtney Edgecomb, president and CEO of the United Way of Volusia-Flagler Counties.

Last week that help line started getting hundreds more calls than usual every day, Edgecomb said.



Food Brings Hope volunteer Barbara Scott delivered a bag of groceries Friday to Skylar Smith and Brittany Walker, his girlfriend. Smith was recently laid off from his job at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Then his hours were cut at his second job at Steve’s Diner. [NEWS-JOURNAL/NIGEL COOK]

“I can tell you the need is going to intensify,” she said. “When people are laid off, that’s when you’ll see agencies get strapped.”

Even people who are working but are suddenly faced with paying for childcare until schools reopen, or are forced to quit their jobs because they can’t line up childcare, are going to be in trouble financially, she said.

The amount of help agencies can provide will depend on the level of generosity from the community, Edgecomb said. She said she’ll stay in touch with different agencies to see what they’re doing, such as the YMCA staying open for childcare. And she’ll try to help with rent, mortgage and utility payments.

Food Brings Hope founder Forough Hosseini is also scrambling to keep up with a spike in demand that shot up last week.

Food Brings Hope provides more than 1,700 kids meals and academic enrichment through programs at 30 schools. But with children out of school at least until next month, and their families beginning to struggle, Hosseini is having to reconfigure and ramp up the program’s assistance.

The Daytona Tortugas Minor League baseball team is offering help, and Jersey Mike’s will give free sandwiches.

Realty Pros Assured Broker Bill Navarra told Hosseini he would donate 1% of his company’s commission to Food Brings Hope for the rest of the month.

Donors are upping their contributions, and the county government is also helping financially. Hosseini said the best thing people can do to help is to donate online or mail Food Brings Hope gift cards for places such as Wal-Mart, Target and Publix.

“We’re overwhelmed with people’s kindness, but we’re also overwhelmed with need,” Hosseini said. “The kindness is amazing. Now we have to manage that.”

She needs volunteers to deliver food, and her staff is reaching out to churches and community centers to see if they can become pickup spots for food while schools are closed.

Food Brings Hope is getting pleas from people who normally wouldn’t be served by the program. The nonprofit got a call from a 26-year-old Daytona State College student who works at Red Lobster and had his hours cut, leaving him unable to pay his rent.

A pregnancy assistance center in DeLand also asked for help.

“Overnight people can’t afford baby formula and food because their work hours are cut, and now they’re panicking,”

Hosseini said.

People in their 70s are showing up at the program’s pantry in the Pierson area.

“We can’t tell them this is for families with children,” Hosseini said. “If they’re showing up, they’re hungry. So we give them a food bag. It’s happening every day. We can’t help everyone. It’s really overwhelming.”

The Council on Aging of Volusia County, which provided more than 178,000 meals to people 65 and older last year, is still managing to get food to its clients with a few adjustments. The agency’s 350 volunteers are still delivering nearly 500 hot meals Monday through Friday, and supplementing that with two frozen meals for the weekend for some clients.

They’ve also been delivering toilet paper, which has suddenly become a hot commodity as people panic shop.

Last week the Council on Aging closed its dining sites in city buildings and churches for senior citizens who can still drive or be transported. But those clients are being given the opportunity to pick up to-go meals or get home delivery.

Sarah Gurtis, president and CEO of the Council on Aging, said she’s getting more calls from people worried about an elderly parent or neighbor afraid to leave their house.

“If we identify a senior in need, we can help them right away,” she said, explaining usual screening processes are being fast tracked. “We’ll find a way to meet the need.”

In addition to food assistance, the agency also helps with cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, bathing, grooming and pest control.

The need and the outpouring of help has proliferated county-wide. In DeLand, the city help set up a program for downtown businesses that allows people to order food and retail items by calling ahead or going online, and then picking things up at one of 21 spots set up for curbside service or inside the business.

There has also been a GoFundMe page set up for DeLand bartenders that so far has raised more than \$8,000.

Deltona Mayor Heidi Herzberg said city leaders have asked Deltona firefighters and sheriff’s deputies to let city officials know if they see someone in need of help.

Deltona residents are helping one another with things like a mothers’ group in the city that collected food for children Wednesday at Deltona United Church of Christ. There’s also a Deltona Facebook group called Neighbors Helping Neighbors that’s allowing people to offer rides and share information about what’s available at stores.

Deltona animal lovers are connecting to make sure pets have a home and are fed. Social media has been a huge help as people are forced to isolate physically more and more, Herzberg said.

“I’ve just seen people who would never connect if it wasn’t for social media,” she said.

Herzberg said maybe the virus will open people’s eyes to the struggle all around them.

“There’s a lot of need I think a lot of us don’t realize is there,” Herzberg said. “Maybe in the long run humanity will prevail, and we’ll realize all the people who need help. In the long run there’s always good people.”