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Senate

The Senate met at 9 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ELIZABETH WARREN, a Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, the center of our peace, continue to be a shield for our Nation. Watch over our citizens and give them Your wisdom.

Lord, You alone are our sure foundation. Today, may our lawmakers stand on the rock of Your truth as they seek to do Your will. Use them to transform cacophony into harmony. May the words they speak bring healing to our land.

And, Lord, comfort those who mourn, particularly the family of U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 3, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable ELIZABETH WARREN, a

Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Ms. WARREN thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

SETTING FORTH THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. Con. Res 5, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A concurrent resolution (S. Con. Res. 5) setting forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2021 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2022 through 2030.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

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

ORGANIZATION RESOLUTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I am happy to report this morning that the leadership of both parties have finalized the organizing resolution for the Senate. We will pass the resolution through the Senate today, which means that committees can promptly set up and get to work—with Democrats holding the gavels.

For the information of the Senate, the Democratic caucus has announced

its committee memberships for the next 2 years. I am confident our Members are ready to hit the ground running on the most important issues that face our country.

Senate Democrats are not going to waste any time taking on the biggest challenges facing our country and our planet. I have already instructed the incoming Democratic chairs of all relevant committees to begin holding hearings on the climate crisis in preparation for enacting President Biden's Build Back Better agenda, which includes major climate legislation.

It is long past time for the Senate to take a leading role to combat the existential threat of our time—climate. As we all know, climate change touches virtually every aspect of our economy and involves virtually every aspect of public policy. So as the Biden Administration prepares a whole-of-government approach to combating climate change, the Democratic majority will pursue a whole-of-Senate approach as well.

Some of this work has already started. Two years ago, Senate Democrats established the first-ever Senate Special Committee on the Climate Crisis. I have promised that any action we take on infrastructure, in particular, will prioritize green infrastructure and the creation of green jobs, and create many jobs—good-paying jobs—we will.

Personally, I have introduced legislation to speed our country's transition toward clean cars that has the support of the environmental community, the labor unions, and some of the car manufacturers.

Make no mistake, in several different ways, this Democratic majority will compel the Senate to forcefully, relentlessly, and urgently address climate change, beginning with work in all of the relevant committees.

So as we set up new committee structures, I look forward to working with the new Democratic chairs on ways their committees will address the climate crisis. I look forward to speaking

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle about finding some common ground on this issue. And, most importantly, I look forward to propelling this Chamber into action on a crisis that concerns not only all of our futures but the futures of our children and our grandchildren. It is our solemn obligation to leave behind a planet upon which future generations can grow and prosper.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, now on COVID, yesterday afternoon the Senate took the first step in preparing the rescue package for an economy and a country that is still in the throes of crisis. The \$1.9 trillion budget resolution is designed to meet the needs of a country that has been devastated by disease and recession for nearly a year. It has been such a long time. We need real help.

Unlike most crises, which affect one particular sector of the economy or another, one part of the country or another, the COVID-19 pandemic affects the entire country and nearly every aspect of American life. There is not one person in America, in my judgment, whose life hasn't been significantly changed by this awful crisis. The challenges we must overcome are manifold. So we must produce a bill that addresses each of those changes and challenges in turn—housing and agriculture and education, help for the unemployed, small businesses, our healthcare system, and our State and local governments. And we cannot fall short of the needs of each of those areas.

History has taught us hard lessons about the cost of small thinking during times of big challenge and about the cost of delay during moments of great urgency.

Secretary Yellen told the Democratic caucus yesterday that it is her belief that if Congress fails to dedicate the necessary resources to meet the needs of the American people and survive this crisis, we will see long-term scarring in our economy and our country would be mired in the COVID crisis for years.

The income inequality and wealth inequality that plagues our Nation has been exacerbated by this crisis because it is certainly the lower half of the American people who have suffered the most and needs to be remediated. And that is what we aim to do.

We must not—must not—repeat the mistakes of the past and do too little, too reluctantly, and too late. We will not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Our goal is simple: to help the American people and the American economy and do it fast. Over the next 2 days, the Senate will be in session for debate on the budget resolution. There will be an open bipartisan amendment process. We invite participation from both sides of the aisle in that process, but I urge Members not to lose sight of what this legislation will mean for the American people.

For Americans who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own, this

rescue package will extend enhanced unemployment benefits. For parents—I have spoken to so many who are desperate for the day they can send their children back to school safely—this rescue package will include resources for schools to make that happen quicker. For teachers and firefighters and busdrivers and nurses worried about the fate of their jobs, this rescue package will follow through on providing aid for State and local governments. For restaurants and bars, for theaters and farmers, for small businesses of every stripe, this rescue package will make another round of Federal loans and grants available to you. And for every American struggling to make ends meet, who, month by month, has fallen further behind on the rent or mortgage, who has the power or the heat or the water shut off, for every American who has had to choose which meal they were going to skip that day, this rescue package will send direct assistance in the form of a check.

And, of course, this rescue package will support the production and distribution of the vaccine that is the key to ending the crisis. The past administration—in terms of distribution, in terms of working with the States to get these vaccines out—has been so derelict. It has been one of the greatest failures of any Presidency. The new Biden Administration is focused on making more vaccines, getting them out quickly, getting them out fairly, and doing it effectively and efficiently. We have to help get that done.

So I, alongside the Democratic committee chairs responsible for drafting this legislation, will be meeting with President Biden at the White House today, a few hours from now. Our caucus is eager to discuss next steps, and we are united in our resolve to deliver on a rescue plan that provides the American people the relief they so desperately need.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

HONORING OFFICER BRIAN D. SICKNICK

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this morning, U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick lies in honor under the dome of the institution he swore to defend—and died defending.

Four weeks ago, the Rotunda was strewn with the debris of an insurrectionist mob. Today, it is adorned in solemn thanksgiving for the sacrifice of a hero. On January 6, those who sought to obstruct our democracy were confronted by a sworn officer and military veteran who was determined to

protect it. In the face of lawlessness, Brian Sicknick paid the ultimate price to uphold a solemn oath. He gave our Nation the last full measure of devotion.

Our democratic Republic was built to endure, but it needs heroes like the officers of the U.S. Capitol Police to support and defend it. So, today, we mourn and give thanks for the true patriot who lies in the Rotunda. The Senate and the entire country send our deepest condolences to Officer Sicknick's family and all who loved him. His name will never be forgotten.

SCHOOLS

Now, Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, this pandemic has forced Americans to confront numerous and compounding tragedies. Almost 450,000 Americans have been killed; millions of livelihoods have been upended; and millions of American kids, especially those who attend public school, have been robbed of an entire year—and counting—of proper school.

Despite heroic efforts from students, parents, and teachers, so-called remote learning has proven a poor substitute for the real thing. Research suggests that, even if the average remote-learning student had gotten back in the classroom last month, they would already have missed multiple months' worth of learning compared to a normal year.

Forty percent of high schoolers in St. Paul now have failing grades. In Houston, it is 40 percent of all students. Tampa's school district has reportedly just lost track of thousands of kids altogether—and this pain isn't spread equally. The worst has fallen on the most vulnerable, including lower income households, students of color, and students with special needs and their families.

The fallout isn't just academic. Replacing the structure, friendships, and activities of school with isolated screen time has predictably caused spikes in mental health concerns. Schools normally keep an eye on kids with challenging home lives and are too often the most reliable sources of hot meals and on and on.

We know with certainty now that K-12 schooling cannot move online indefinitely, like a white-collar workplace. It is more like routine medical procedures—something that can be postponed a few weeks in a pinch but which our society really cannot do without, and some families aren't having to. Many private and parochial schools have been in person since the fall, and many European countries have kept kids in school nearly this whole time, but in places across America, where public education depends on the whims of powerful public sector unions, the best interests of children have often come dead last.

As the months have rolled by and the data have poured in, it has become clear that schools can open safely. Just last week, CDC researchers affirmed:

“With proper prevention efforts . . . we can keep transmission in schools and educational settings quite low.”

This confirms what scientists were observing as far back as October, when it was reported: “Transmission by young children to adults seems to be negligible as long as safety measures are in place.”

Dr. Fauci, whose expertise was supposed to guide the Biden administration’s whole approach, said last week: “We can keep the children in school and get them back to school safely.” That is Dr. Fauci.

An administration that puts facts and science first would be conducting a full-court press to open schools.

Federal funding is not an obstacle. That is more goalpost-moving. Congress has poured more than \$110 billion into making education safe. As of last week, States and local school districts had only spent about \$4 billion of the roughly \$68 billion we set aside for K–12 schools. That leaves \$64 billion in the pipeline already.

Remember, science tells us that schools are largely made safe with simple precautions. Science is not the obstacle. Federal money is not the obstacle. The obstacle is a lack of willpower not among students, not among parents—just among the rich, powerful unions that donate huge sums to Democrats and get a stranglehold over education in many communities.

Apparently, Big Labor’s talking points have already displaced Dr. Fauci as the White House go-to source. The President’s Chief of Staff keeps saying we need even more massive Federal funding before teachers can go back. There is no scientific basis for that, none whatsoever.

The goalpost-moving doesn’t stop with money. In several places, these unions sought to elbow toward the front of the line for vaccinations—only to turn around and say: Thanks for those vaccinations but don’t think these will necessarily get our folks back in the classroom any time soon.

Too often, local officials just roll over and submit to these tactics. In my hometown of Louisville, KY, the largest school district in the State has a union-funded board of education vice chair. He is now saying that, even if all school personnel get vaccines, he would still be reluctant to open schools. In San Francisco, the 28-year-old board of education president—28 years old—argued a few days ago that vulnerable kids aren’t really missing out on learning; they are just learning different things, and it is the system’s fault for not measuring all of the valuable cultural experiences they have had while being stuck at home.

What nonsense.

Families are losing patience—and fast. We could not function with remote police or remote firefighters or remote dental surgeons, and we would never pretend otherwise. Kids, parents, and a lot of talented teachers have given online learning their all, but we

will be deluding ourselves if we continue to accept this pale shadow of proper schooling when all of the science—all of it—points the other way.

No more goalpost-moving. States and districts have got to follow the science and get American education back on track.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

Mr. President, on a related matter, in the past year, Congress has worked together to pass five major rescue packages on a bipartisan basis. The Democratic leader spent months saying that any pandemic relief should pass with broad bipartisan support.

He said last July: “Sitting in your own office, writing a bill, and then demanding the other side support it is not anyone’s idea of bipartisanship.”

But, yesterday, less than a day after several Senate Republicans spent, literally, 2 hours meeting with President Biden, Senate Democrats plowed ahead with a party-line vote to set the table for a partisan jam. The new President talks a lot about unity, but his White House staff and congressional leadership are working with a different playbook.

We will be discussing the facts on schools, on jobs, and on healthcare in depth in the days to come, but the rushed budget process that will play out this week is exactly the wrong path toward making law. Senate Republicans will be ready and waiting with a host of amendments to improve the rushed procedural step that is being jammed through.

We will be getting Senators on the record about whether taxpayers should fund checks for illegal immigration, whether Democrats should raise taxes on small businesses in the midst of this historic crisis, and whether generous Federal funding should pour into school districts where the unions refuse to let schools open, and this is just a small taste.

The American people will see Republicans are focused on smart and responsible policies to reopen the country, and they will see Democrats who seem desperate to make their first act in power the same kind of massive, partisan, poorly targeted borrowing spree that permanently wounded the last Democratic Presidency right out of the gate.

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

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

IRAN

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I think there is something that may be coming up that is worth addressing right now and addressing early. It has been a concern, a bipartisan concern, for a long period of time, and that is that Presi-

dent Biden has made it clear that he intends to reenter the 2015 Iran deal, better known as the JCPOA.

Now, this was something that disturbed a lot of people—a lot of Democrats as well as Republicans—back during the Obama years, and I want to get it on record here to make sure that reentering that Iran deal would be a terrible mistake and that the administration would face stiff opposition in Congress if he tried to go that route. There are things that we can do but not reentering that one. There can be no return to a deal with limitations on Iran’s nuclear program that begin to expire in 4 years or the return to a deal that, ultimately, allows Iran to enrich enough uranium for a nuclear weapon after those limitations.

Keep in mind that Iran is the country that is right in the middle of all of the terrorist activity, promoting terrorism around the world, and to even think about allowing them to keep some kind of a nuclear capability that can be used as a bomb—it is just unthinkable that it could happen. We couldn’t return to a deal that lifts the sanctions on a government that is the leading state sponsor of terrorism and is targeting U.S. personnel and partners across the Middle East. You don’t need to take my word for it. My Democratic colleagues warned the Obama administration in 2015. I was here. I remember when it happened. They were talking about the shortcomings of that deal.

One was the senior Senator from New York, the current majority leader, CHUCK SCHUMER, who warned that, under the Iran deal, “inspections are not ‘anywhere, anytime,’” and “the 24-day delay before we can inspect is troubling.”

That would be right. Essentially, what he said was that they can do anything they want to do for 24 days before we restrict anything that they are doing. He was right.

He further said: “That delay would enable Iran to escape detection of any illicit building and improving of possible military dimensions—the tools that go into building a bomb but don’t emit radioactivity.” That door was left wide open that this could take place.

Or listen to the Democratic colleague from New Jersey, Senator MENENDEZ. He is the new chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, and he warned that the deal meant “we are now embarked not on preventing nuclear proliferation, but on managing or containing it, which leaves us with a far less desirable, less secure, and less certain world order.”

Or listen to my Democratic colleague from West Virginia, Senator MANCHIN. He serves with me on the committee that I had chaired for quite some time, the Senate Committee on Armed Services. He warned us. He said: “Lifting sanctions without ensuring that Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism is neutralized is dangerous to regional and American security.”

I mean, these are no-brainers. These are things that Democrats and Republicans alike were warning us about—of the frailties that were in that proposal back in 2015.

Now, my Democratic colleagues were pretty prophetic in what they were warning. They were warning three things. First of all, we still, after this period of time, do not know the full scope of Iran's nuclear program. Secondly, Iran's nuclear production slowed, but it did not end after that. Third, Iran did, in fact, use its sanctions relief to fund terrorism, and it continues to support groups who target Americans for murder.

I just wish that then-Vice President Biden had listened to my Democratic colleagues and their warning about the Iran deal's shortcomings then, and I hope that he will listen now that he is President. It is more significant, and there is simply no good argument for returning to a bad deal.

Too often, supporters of the Iran deal have accused the Iran deal's critics—talking to me and others, I am sure—of being opposed to any deal at all. Back in 2015, the Obama administration depicted the opponents of the Iran deal as warmongers.

Let me just be clear. Nobody wants war with Iran. If anything, I believe the Obama-era deal makes war more likely by enriching one of the worst state sponsors of terrorism and by giving it a clear pathway towards nuclear weapons capabilities.

I am not making this stuff up. This is serious. Calling the people who oppose him warmongers couldn't be further from the truth.

In fact, after killing Iran's arch-terrorist, Soleimani, last year, President Trump explicitly called for a deal that makes the world safer and more peaceful. He was calling for that at that time.

So we don't want war, but we also don't want a flawed Iran deal. That terrible deal isn't and never has been the only choice. But we would absolutely consider supporting a good deal. What would a good deal look like? I want to highlight four main principles that we would look for, and this is something the President can do now.

First, the deal has to be comprehensive. That means addressing all of Iran's bad behavior: its funding of terrorism, terrorist proxies, its ballistic missile program, its nuclear program—the things my Democratic colleagues were worried about back in 2015.

Secondly, the deal has to be inclusive of the views of Israel and our Arab partners. The Obama administration sidestepped their concerns, and President Biden should not do the same now. We should have learned from that.

Third, the deal must be permanent. The 2015 deal allowed for sunset provisions that would ultimately allow Iran to possess a nuclear weapons capability. And I will be clear: Iran should never be allowed to have a nuclear capability.

Fourth, the deal has to be transparent. It has to allow for regular and unconditional inspections of Iran's nuclear program, just as the majority leader called for 6 years ago. I mean, what is wrong with making sure that we are allowed to make inspections to make sure they are doing what they have agreed to do? There is nothing wrong with that.

Now, these are things my colleagues and I agree on. President Biden can find bipartisan support here. To repeat, we want a diplomatic resolution, not war, but that means a good resolution.

Of course, it is far from clear that the Iranian regime is ready and willing to engage in serious negotiations. So I call on the Biden administration to lay the groundwork now so that a new deal has the foundation to succeed when the Iranian regime is ready. You know, that is a logical thing that I think would encompass a lot of support from the Republican side and support from the House.

Specifically, this means maintaining our leverage with Iran through sanctions and a strong U.S. military posture in the region. It also means opening discussions with our European allies and our other regional partners to coordinate priorities for the new deal. Most importantly, it means working with Congress early and often so that there is a sustainable, bipartisan path forward when the time is right.

Along those lines, I was disappointed by President Biden's decision to appoint someone who negotiated the Iran deal as his new Iran envoy. A new deal requires new thinking. Bipartisan cooperation won't be achieved by elevating the partisans of the past. If something didn't work back then, just try somebody else. Send new personnel working on these problems.

Moving forward, the Biden administration should expect difficult confirmations for any nominee who was involved in negotiating that deal back in 2015. President Biden has an opportunity to correct the Obama administration's mistakes on Iran. It has a chance to build bipartisan congressional support for a diplomatic resolution that is truly comprehensive, inclusive, transparent, and permanent.

A successful Iran deal allows the United States to focus more squarely on the challenges of Russia and China. A return to the Iran deal, however, will empower the Iranian regime and keep us mired in the region.

I think everyone knows Iran. It is the world leader in terrorism, and we should do everything we can to make sure they don't get a nuclear capability to develop a nuclear weapon. I can't imagine that anyone could argue with that.

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

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

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as we all have learned, the devastation caused by COVID-19 reaches far beyond the health impact of the virus itself. Tens of millions of Americans have lost their jobs or other sources of income. Countless small businesses no longer exist, and the stress and uncertainty surrounding the pandemic has taken a toll on the mental health of every American. That is especially true for children, whose worlds have been flipped upside down.

Last spring, schools in Texas and across the country transitioned from in-person to virtual instruction in order to help stop the spread of the virus. In the beginning, we thought this was a short-term measure, a way to keep students, teachers, and their families safe from the virus we knew very little about at the time. I don't think any of us expected that those closures would last as long as they have, with many students across the country coming up on their 1-year anniversary of virtual learning.

As weeks turned into months, it became clear that online instruction was no replacement for classroom learning. We know many families just don't have the ability either to access broadband or they don't have the supervision at home of family members to help keep children on task when it comes to virtual learning. It is a poor substitute, in most instances, unless it is just absolutely necessary.

Last spring, schools in Texas and across the country transitioned to virtual instruction, as I said, to stop the spread of the virus. We thought this would be a way to stop the spread, but as weeks turned into months, it became clear that many kids were falling behind, especially in foundational subjects like math and reading, and the learning deficit is even greater for students of color and those in high poverty communities.

One study found that for math, White students began this year about 1 to 3 months behind in their learning, while students of color fell 3 to 5 months behind.

We know that the impact is not purely academic. There is also a serious mental and emotional toll. The Texas Tribune recently shared a story of one student, a boy they refer to as Jordan. He was a student in the Frisco Independent School District, and like kids across the country, he struggled with the challenge of virtual learning. This fall, his normal A's and B's dropped to F's, and the further he fell behind, the harder it was for him to catch up.

In October, Jordan opened up a Google doc and typed an absolutely agonizing message. He said "give me 10 GOOD reasons why I shouldnt kill myself here."

And when you think that can't get any more heartbreaking, it does. The list was blank. An 11-year-old boy felt

so lost and defeated, he couldn't come up with a single reason to continue living.

Well, if there is a bright spot in this otherwise very dark story, it is that this incident did not go unnoticed. Jordan was using a school-issued computer, and the school district's technology department quickly flagged this alarming information for counselors, who alerted Jordan's mother. She was able to intervene, thankfully, before those dark thoughts could be turned into action and get Jordan the mental health treatment he needed.

While I am glad to report that Jordan is now back in the classroom where his grades are improving and he is able to spend time with his friends—an important part of the socializing function of our schools and going to class with others—but, sadly, the pain and suffering this student experienced is not unique. The Frisco Independent School District, where Jordan is a student, has already surpassed the number of students hospitalized for mental health concerns from last school year, and the number of students considering attempting or dying by suicide is also on track to break previous records. The pandemic has simply taken a devastating toll on our children academically, socially, and emotionally. So I am here to add my voice to those who say we need our schools to open and, of course, to do so safely, which I believe they can.

In December, the then-President-Elect Biden promised to safely reopen the majority of schools within the first hundred days in the White House. He said it should be a national priority to get our kids back into school and to keep them in school. I agree. Our children deserve the quality and the stability that only in-person instruction can provide, and parents deserve the option to choose the learning model that works best for their kids.

That is why Congress has appropriated more than \$110 billion to support education, including \$67 billion specifically for K-12 students. This funding has allowed schools to supply their students with what they need for virtual learning where that is required, including laptops and hotspots, while also preparing for a safe return to the classroom. Administrators at each school are able to evaluate their individual needs and risks, and I am sure all of them vary by circumstance to some extent. But they also need to implement the necessary precautions to keep, obviously, the students and teachers safe.

Texas schools have used Federal funding to update their air filtration systems, purchase personal protective equipment, and implement regular disinfecting. The results are pretty clear. A headline from the Houston Chronicle in December read: "COVID Spread Remains Minimal in Texas Schools Despite State Surge."

The truth is, the virus doesn't affect all of us identically. There are a lot of differences according to age.

The President has repeatedly emphasized his trust in science, so let's take a look at the science here. Just last week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a report that found "there has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission."

The lead author of that report affirmed that even in places with otherwise high infection rates, there is no evidence that schools will transmit the virus at a higher rate than the general community.

In short, it seems that schools are not a breeding ground for COVID-19, and as long as commonsense precautions are taken, then schools can reopen safely. I know that has been the case in a lot of the parochial schools where, frankly, if they didn't have students showing up for class, they would be out of business. It is only in the public schools where you see this phenomena of extended virtual learning and a refusal of many teachers to return to the classroom.

I know this has presented a dilemma for President Biden because in this case the science is at odds with a key group of his supporters, which are teachers unions.

Unions in a number of major cities, like Chicago, have refused to return to school, despite the fact that evidence shows that schools are able to open safely—again, if proper precautions are taken. And Congress has provided tens of billions of dollars to help them do so, and teachers, like others across the country are being vaccinated. Teachers unions demand, in some cases, that schools be closed altogether.

Just outside of the District of Columbia, in Fairfax County, VA, the situation is even more bewildering. The school board and teachers union have said they will not return to schools until all students are vaccinated. As a reminder, there is currently no approved vaccine for children under the age of 16 and, likely, won't be for some time. Yet even with no return to in-person learning in sight, teachers are still receiving the vaccine, which I think is a good thing. More shots in arms ought to be all of our goal.

But as you can imagine, the Biden administration is having a tough time explaining this one away—how, on one hand, the President said, "Let's get children safely back into classrooms," and, on the other hand, many teachers unions refusing to return.

In a recent television appearance, the President's Chief of Staff was asked why the teachers unions are overruling what the studies would otherwise show, and he appeared to come to the defense of the unions' decision. Well, that is not a commitment to science, and it is important that all of us listen to the science when we make our decisions and that they not be made based on a political agenda or who is for or against the proposition. Our focus ought to be clearly on the students and

the quality of education that they are receiving, as well as the collateral damage that is being done by keeping them out of the classroom.

The science is clear. If the proper precautions are taken, it is safe for our schools to reopen. Again, we have provided tens of billions of dollars to support safe reopening, including \$55 billion to K-12 schools in the omnibus that was signed into law just last December, just about a month ago.

This funding is helping schools safely welcome their students back to the classroom, where they can better learn, socialize, and build a strong foundation for a successful future.

We need our children to be well educated. This is the fundamental right in our democracy and a necessity in a self-governing form of government.

The administration shouldn't try to distance itself from the President's 100-day promise. It should do more to encourage a safe return. When it comes to reopening schools, President Biden needs to take his own advice and listen to the science and not the teachers unions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

S. CON. RES. 5

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, we are 11 months into the most severe healthcare crisis this country or the world has seen in more than a century. And for much of this past year, we haven't done anywhere close to enough to help the millions of Americans who are suffering—suffering not only from the virus itself but from the economic implosion created by this pandemic.

The American people are in desperate need of help. It has been many, many months since we passed the CARES Act. It was way back in March of last year. That is a long time ago—10 months ago. Then the House, down this hallway, in May—middle of May—passed the Heroes Act, saying: Let's do what we need to do for healthcare and housing, for education, for creating good-paying jobs to help America address both the healthcare side and the economic side of this pandemic. And this Senate said no. This Senate said: We are sorry. We spent all of our money on tax breaks for the richest Americans. We don't have the resources to help out ordinary Americans in the face of this pandemic. We prefer to do nothing.

And the prefer-to-do-nothing leadership of this body proceeded to do nothing in June and July and August and September and October, into November. Meanwhile, the American people were gearing up for an election, to basically weigh in on the direction that this country was going, and here the Senate sat and did nothing in the face of millions of struggling families across our country. Finally, after the election, a minimal amount was done with the omnibus bill.

Well, the time for playing the fiddle while Rome burns or twiddling our thumbs while America suffers is over.

In the campaign, Democrats said: We will end the inaction of this Senate in addressing the Nation's challenges, the families' struggle across America, if you put us in a place to do so.

And they did. To the House down the hall, this Chamber, and the White House down Pennsylvania Avenue, the American said: Get your act together. Engage in competent, professional, direct, bold assistance to these enormous challenges we face.

And Joe Biden promised that if elected President, he would utilize every resource of the Federal Government to take on the COVID pandemic and help American families get back on their feet.

The American people spoke loudly. They spoke clearly, and now we intend to deliver on the promises and provide real help to American families and businesses struggling in these difficult times.

There are a variety of ways that we can go forward to address this challenge. Certainly, one is to have a bill on this floor, have it open to amendments—relevant amendments, germane amendments—proceed to see what the majority of this body, 51 Members, would say should be changed in that bill or modified in that bill. But that tradition has been absolutely squashed by the leadership in this Senate over the past few years under Republican leadership. I would like to see it restored. I would like to see it restored, but with it goes not blocking the bill from leaving this Chamber after thorough deliberation has occurred.

We know that in the 6 years that President Johnson led this Chamber, there was not but one—one—blockade to keep bills that had received majority support from leaving this Chamber. But in the 6 years that Harry Reid led this Chamber, there were over 400 times that the minority said: No, we will not let this bill leave this Chamber.

That is exactly—exactly—the type of obstruction and delay that is making this Chamber dysfunctional. We have already seen it in terms of the organizing resolution. It is still not done—still not done—because the minority leader—now—Minority Leader MITCH MCCONNELL—wants to delay and obstruct, delay and obstruct, delay and obstruct, as he did from the time the House passed the Heroes Act until the modest bill in December.

I would love to see this bill—this \$1.9 trillion bill—on this floor and let the majority works its way. Ask if more money was needed to help children return to the classroom—my colleague from Texas was just addressing that topic—and more assistance in helping families still unemployed by the meltdown, more assistance to the small businesses. Or maybe some Members would like to propose less help here or less help there, but that goes with the ability to move the bill quickly for action. We await that kind of pledge,

that kind of pledge to end the delay-and-obstruct tactics of the minority.

In the meantime, therefore, we must go forward on a double path and say we will prepare to go through the reconciliation process, the simple majority process that comes from the Budget Act of 1973—the same process Republicans have used time and time again to give tax breaks to the richest Americans. Any process used in that fashion, I think, was abused. But using it to help ordinary families get back on their feet—that honors that process.

Where do we stand now? One in five renters in America are behind on paying their rent because they are struggling financially. Nearly 24 million Americans, 11 percent of all adults, report not having enough food in their homes. Millions of children are affected by that shortage of food. Millions of American children are going hungry. That is where we are right now. Hundreds of thousands of businesses are shuttering their doors for good, and hundreds of thousands more are on the verge of doing so. Too many classrooms echo with the sounds of silence rather than the laughter of children.

This bill is about changing that. We need to move quickly. Our children are struggling so hard to do their class work over a computer, over a Zoom. It is so hard to feel good about life when you don't have the chance to play and interact with other children, so depressing when you are trapped in a house.

Yes, we need to reopen the schools. So let's pass this bill, and let's pass this bill quickly, and let's get those \$1,400 payments in the hands of adults and children, stimulating the economy from the foundation up—not Wall Street down, the foundation up—helping struggling families, helping struggling small businesses—Main Street, not Wall Street—payments that will help put food on the table, keep the lights turned on, keep the internet turned on, make sure that a family doesn't suffer eviction.

And strengthen the payments for those who need it most, the unemployed. Now, we are facing a deadline of March 14—March 14—when the Federal partnership in supporting the unemployment benefits runs out. So we must act before that happens.

Those who know the reconciliation process know that it is lightning fast to do it in a 6-week period, but that is what we must do, and we must start now. If, in the meantime, the minority decides to abandon its dedication to obstruction and delay and be full participants in helping America, then let's get that bill on the floor and go that path. I am fine with that, but it cannot prevent us from acting.

We were elected to act. The American people support strong, bold, generous action now to prevent years and years of recession ahead, of struggling ahead.

These are unprecedented times, and in unprecedented difficult times we

need to think of ourselves as all one community. We need to help and partner with our States and our counties and our cities and our Tribes. We need to get them the help they need that has been so fiercely opposed—help to enable them to do basic education improvements, basic public safety, making sure that the firefighters and police officers and teachers are still able to do the work they are called upon to do, and help those Tribal governments purchase personal protective equipment and have access to telemedicine services.

There are no blue and red communities when it comes to a national crisis across this country. When it comes to disease, it affects people, regardless of which party you belong to or what part of the country you live in. A bipartisan attack on our health should involve a bipartisan response in this Chamber, not the obstruction-and-delay tactics the majority has come to view as their core strategy. It must end.

When hundreds of mayors wrote to us and said "We need help; act now," they weren't Democratic mayors; they weren't Republican mayors. They were bipartisan mayors from all across this country saying: Now is the time. We need help now.

Yet delay and obstruction was the strategy of the minority. They had spent all their money, they said, giving tax breaks to the richest Americans. There is no room to help ordinary working Americans.

That philosophy doesn't belong in a government of, by, and for the people. If you want a government of, by, and for the powerful, then find a different Constitution, a different system of government. But here the people have spoken. They have spoken clearly, and it is our responsibility to respond.

To those mayors, those bipartisan mayors, across this country: We hear you, and we stand with you. Let's move promptly and boldly to address this crisis.

The President has put out a very clear plan that addresses every significant area that the mayors and community leaders across this country have said they need help in. Let's be their partner in that assistance and put America back on its feet.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

HONORING OFFICER BRIAN D. SICKNICK

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, a few minutes ago, I had the opportunity to pay my respects to U.S. Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick, who lies in honor right now in the Capitol Rotunda.

By all accounts, Brian Sicknick decided early on that he wanted to be a police officer. He joined the National Guard as a way to achieve this, serving our country for 6 years before finally joining the Capitol Police in 2008.

On January 6, 2021, he joined his fellow police officers to defend the Capitol from invasion by a violent mob. He

was attacked by the invaders, pepper-sprayed twice, and reportedly hit in the head with a fire extinguisher. He later collapsed at his office as a result of his injuries and was transported to the hospital, where he died the next day.

While reading accounts of Officer Sicknick's death, I was particularly struck by reports that he returned to his division office after the day that he had had. A lot of us, after having been pepper-sprayed twice and hit on the head, would probably have made a beeline for the hospital or for home. Even if, like Officer Sicknick, we weren't aware of just how badly we had been injured, I am not sure we would have returned to the office. But Officer Sicknick did.

His family noted that Officer Sicknick had "an incredible work ethic. He was very serious about showing up to work on time and refused to call out sick unless absolutely necessary."

We saw that dedication on January 6. His first thought was not of his injuries but of the job that he was committed to.

We are the beneficiaries of the service and dedication of men and women like Brian Sicknick, men and women who get up every day not knowing what they will face but willing to sacrifice up to and including their very lives to protect those that need protecting.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

All of us marvel and are moved when we hear stories of those who have laid down their lives to protect others: the soldier who jumps on a grenade to save his buddies, the mother who leaps in front of her child to protect her, the firefighter who dies trying to rescue someone from a burning house.

But Officer Sicknick's story hits particularly sharply because Officer Sicknick laid down his life for us. He died for us. He died for me, for every Senator in this Chamber, and for every Representative, for every staff member, for every cafeteria worker and maintenance worker and administrative worker in the Capitol Complex.

We were in danger, and he stepped forward to protect us. And he died for us. Greater love hath no man than this.

There is no repaying such a sacrifice. There is no earning it. We can only honor it and try to live our lives in such a way as to be worthy of it.

Officer Brian Sicknick died as he lived: defending the U.S. Capitol and all those within it.

My thoughts and prayers are with Officer Sicknick's family and with all those who loved him as they mourn the life of this brave man.

BIPARTISANSHIP

Mr. President, in his victory speech and later in his inauguration address, President Biden made it clear that he intended to govern for all Americans.

He pledged to be "a President who seeks not to divide, but to unify. Who doesn't see Red and Blue states but a United States. And who will work with all my heart to win the confidence of the whole people."

I was encouraged by his words and hopeful of the potential for a new day in American politics and real bipartisan legislative work on the priorities facing the American people. It is still a hope I have, but I am discouraged by the path that we are on here in Congress.

Yesterday, Senate Democrats voted to proceed to a budget resolution designed to allow Democrats to pass COVID legislation on a purely partisan basis.

As I noted a couple of weeks ago, it is common to talk about unity at inaugurations. I have been to a lot of them, but all too often that commitment is quickly forgotten. And, unfortunately, we are already seeing signs that Members of the Democrat leadership are rapidly abandoning the President's call for bipartisanship.

Democrats' turn toward budget reconciliation—a process that allows certain legislation to pass the Senate with a simple majority instead of 60 votes, which is normal here—would be more understandable if Republicans had categorically refused to consider any additional COVID legislation, but that isn't even close to being the case.

Republicans share Democrats' commitment to COVID priorities, like vaccinating Americans and getting our children back in the classroom. In fact, we passed five—five—COVID relief bills so far in Congress, totaling more than \$4 trillion, and every single one of those bills was passed under Republican leadership in the Senate, with bipartisan cooperation, at the 60-vote threshold.

Just this week, a group of 10 Republicans outlined a \$600 billion COVID proposal that would fund vaccine distribution, extend enhanced unemployment benefits, and provide additional economic support to Americans who need it most. And on Monday night, at the same time that Speaker PELOSI released her budget bill, those 10 Republicans were meeting with President Biden in the Oval Office for 2 hours.

Republicans are more than ready to work with Democrats on additional COVID relief. Now, I won't pretend that we don't have reservations about some of the measures that Democrats have proposed. For instance, I don't think an emergency COVID bill is the place to push through a change that would more than double the Federal minimum wage and directly increase expenses on businesses that have been decimated by the pandemic.

I also think that sending checks to those who don't need them and won't spend them is not a good use of taxpayer money.

But disagreement over aspects of the Democrat proposal does not mean that Republicans are not willing to work with Democrats on COVID relief.

Democrats' move toward a purely partisan pathway on COVID legislation is troubling, but what is even more disturbing is the noise that Democrats are making about gutting the Byrd rule, which was named for and introduced by Democrat Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia and adopted to prevent abuse of the budget reconciliation process and protect the rights of the minority in the Senate.

It limits the proposals that can be considered under budget reconciliation so that the majority party in the Senate cannot use the budget reconciliation process to push through any legislation it wants with a bare majority vote.

But some Democrats are suggesting doing away with the Byrd rule as a way of getting around the legislative filibuster, and that is a big problem. Preserving minority rights was a priority for the Founders. They knew that, in democratic forms of government, tyrannical majorities could easily trample the rights of the minority, so they were determined to put in place a system of checks and balances that would protect the rights of the minority.

One of those checks was the U.S. Senate. And as time has gone on, the legislative filibuster is the Senate rule that has had perhaps the greatest impact on protecting minority rights in the Senate.

But the Byrd rule has played a key role as well. By limiting Senators' ability to use budget reconciliation to get around the filibuster, the Byrd rule has helped ensure that the minority has at least some voice in most legislation passed by the Senate.

In 2017, when Republicans held the majority in Congress as well as the White House, there were calls within our party to gut the Byrd rule and to abolish the filibuster, but the Republican majority in the Senate refused. We knew that abolishing the legislative filibuster, or de facto abolishing it by gutting the Byrd rule, would seriously weaken minority representation in the Senate.

So for the long-term good of the Senate and the country, we refused. We knew that it would be a betrayal of our obligation to Senators to undermine the Senate's key role as a protector of minority rights.

I would just remind Democrats that, back in 2017, they strongly agreed with our decision. I trust that their opinion has not changed simply because they are now in the majority.

Minority representation would be important even if elections tended to break 60-40 or 70-30 in favor of one party or another across the country.

All Americans deserve to be represented in government, but it is particularly important when you consider that our country and the Senate is pretty evenly split right down the middle, which means any attempt to disenfranchise the minority party means disenfranchising half of the entire country.

While the far-left wing of the Democrat party would like to use this election to implement every extreme, pie-in-the-sky, socialist proposal on its list, that is not what the American people voted for in this election. Americans voted for a Presidential candidate historically regarded as a moderate.

Democrats lost seats in the House of Representatives. And while, thanks to the Vice President, they have a tie-breaking vote in the Senate, they did not actually win a majority of seats in the Senate.

My point very simply is that if any mandate was given in this election, it was a mandate for moderation, for bipartisanship, for unity. And I hope that Democrats remember that and resist calls from the far left to gut the Senate's rules and fundamentally change the character of this institution.

I still believe that we can come together in this Congress to address the challenges facing our country, but it is going to require a lot more bipartisanship than we are seeing from a lot of Democrats.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

HONORING BRIAN D. SICKNICK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I just returned from the memorial service for Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick. It was held in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, a place which is reserved on such occasions for those who have brought special honor to the United States. It was appropriate that Brian Sicknick receive that honor.

On January 6, Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick reported for duty and never returned home. A simple red wooden box contained his remains at the service. Tributes were given to him, all deserved, because this man gave his life to protect our Nation, to protect me.

It was protection from an enemy—not foreign enemy but, as we say in our oath, a domestic enemy, American-born and -bred terrorists who streamed into this Capitol building on January 6 at the instigation of President Donald Trump. He had summoned them to Washington on that day because the Constitution required that the Congress meet that day, that we count the electoral votes and announce to America who would be the next President officially. We knew the results State by State. They had been verified over and over again, challenged and verified again.

But this was the formal ceremony which involved calling the States and the vote counts in the House, and if there were objections, considering

them, the objections, in both the House and the Senate. That was the process that President Donald Trump set out to disrupt, so he called a rally of his loyal followers. They met on the Ellipse. He fired up the crowd and sent them to the Capitol Building to stop the count—as they said in their warped logic, “stop the steal.”

They weren't permitted to enter the building, and so they broke it down—the doors, the windows. We have seen the videos over and over. They assaulted every law enforcement officer who stood in their way. Brian Sicknick, of course, lost his life, but there were 140 other police officers who were beaten and maimed and stabbed, who still suffer from those injuries today. The same terrorist mob that took Brian Sicknick's life stormed past everyone who stood in their path. What a day in the history of the United States of America.

Their occupation of the Capitol included their occupation of this Chamber. They marched into this Chamber, opening desks, taking photographs of documents, posing for pictures at the President's chair. They had a jolly time showing off to their friends that they could take over the U.S. Senate.

Next week, we begin the impeachment trial. The House of Representatives has accused this President of instigating an insurrection. When you think of it, could there be anything more serious than provoking a group for the violent overthrow of a legitimate government process?

Some say we shouldn't do this impeachment. They argue any speech given by the President to his mob was protected by the First Amendment. Well, if the First Amendment was designed to protect activities to overthrow our government, then it was a recipe for democracy that would die of its own accord. I think we know better. The Founding Fathers expressly included the impeachment clause in the Constitution for a President who would be so bold as to challenge the very existence of our democracy and the peaceful transition of power.

After the ceremony in the Rotunda, I went to the Rayburn Room in the House and met with Officer Sicknick's family. We stood and talked for a few minutes. In respect to them, I will not repeat our conversation, but I am going to remember it, and I am going to remember them. And although I didn't meet him personally, I will remember him next week when this impeachment trial is underway.

For anyone who makes the argument that when it comes to January 6, it is time for America to “get over it,” I am going to remember one Capitol Police officer who gave his life to protect me and this Capitol. I am also going to remember his family, the loss that they have endured because of a political exercise based on a big lie propagated by the former President of the United States.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, the headline in last Thursday's Chicago Sun-Times captured the grim reality of tens of millions of Americans desperately seeking a COVID vaccine. The headline read: “Looking for a vaccine appointment at your pharmacy? Get ready for ‘The Hunger Games.’” For those who don't know “The Hunger Games,” it is a fictional book turned into a movie about a dystopian future where people are forced to fight one another to the death just to survive.

The Chicago Sun-Times assigned two reporters to try to book COVID-19 vaccine appointments for relatives older than 65 in any one of the major drug-store chains in the Chicago area. The results were discouraging. The websites were hard to navigate, appointments were scarce to nonexistent, and even when they searched for appointments in pharmacies as far as 50 miles away, no luck.

Reporters spoke to people who had gone online at 2 in the morning in the hopes of landing a coveted vaccination slot—no luck. They spoke to a Chicago-area woman who had been trying for days to book a vaccination appointment for her mother, who is 75 years old and battling cancer. That woman knew too well what failing to receive a vaccination could mean. Her mother-in-law is recovering from the virus. Her 85-year-old father died from it 1 week shy of his first official vaccination. After several frustrating days, she was finally able to book an appointment for her mother to be vaccinated. She is relieved for her mother. She is worried about others who are eligible but can't find a vaccination. She said, “It's not fair. It's absolutely ridiculous.”

Earlier this week, Illinois administered its one-millionth dose of COVID vaccine—an important milestone—but in my State and nearly every State, the process for distributing vaccines or getting shots in the arm is still too limited, too slow, too confusing. Too many elderly and other eligible Americans are still scrambling to receive the vaccination.

Let me say in defense of the State I proudly represent. Under Governor Pritzker, we have a pretty good record of vaccination rates. He is doing his best. Unfortunately, the supply is limited and he needs more, and he certainly has plenty of people anxious for it.

This isn't just a Chicago problem. It is a statewide problem. It is a nationwide problem. It reflects that while the Trump administration worked quickly to discover the vaccine, it failed to work with the States in implementing a plan to vaccinate people.

When Joe Biden took office, there were more COVID-19 vaccines in freezers than in the arms of Americans. That was 10 or 12 days ago. The results of those earlier missteps are staggering. Today, the United States, with 5 percent of the world's population, is home to more than 20 percent of the

COVID infections and deaths. As of Monday, more than 26 million Americans have been infected and nearly 440,000 Americans have died of COVID-19. In my State of Illinois, we have seen 1.1 million infections and more than 19,000 deaths.

Even as the Trump administration tried to conceal the truth and squandered precious time in responding to this crisis, other Americans were working heroically to protect their neighbors and friends. These heroes included doctors and nurses on the frontline, orderlies who kept hospitals and health centers clean and safe, even grocery store clerks, truckdrivers, mail carriers, teachers, and many other essential workers. They worked around the clock. They included brilliant scientists and researchers who not only developed COVID vaccines but watched for the variants that were emerging that may or may not be protected.

Sadly, their dedication was not matched by the performance of the previous administration. President Biden is trying to change that. He is trying to dramatically increase the production of vaccine and also the distribution. His plan sets some worthy goals: 100 million Americans vaccinated in 100 days. Boy, I want him to be right. He even said there may be more if we count to the end of the summer. We want to get a pace and have a momentum to break the back of this pandemic once and for all. He calls it the American Rescue Plan. It includes necessary assistance for vaccinations first and foremost, and it should, but then it speaks to the economic crisis that also devastates this country.

His plan provides economic assistance for small businesses—many just barely hanging on; extends unemployment relief for millions of Americans who lost their jobs; and increases funding for food stamps, SNAP benefits, so that 1 in 10 Americans who right now can't afford to put food on the table have an alternative. The President's American Rescue Plan includes funding to dramatically ramp up production of COVID treatment. It includes funding to help schools and universities reopen safely and stay open. It includes funding to help get teachers vaccinated and key administrators.

The American Rescue Plan represents the best thinking of leading economists and public health experts. We can debate it if we wish, but we can't drag our feet. We can't waste a day. People are dying every minute. In fact, every 30 seconds, another American dies from COVID-19.

As the virus circulates and replicates and we dither, variants emerge, mutations emerge, and we wonder if our vaccine is ready for them. Scientists warn that our current COVID vaccines are less effective with new strains. We could rush through this double-shot vaccination across America and perhaps reach our goal sooner rather than later and find that some mutant or variant is a new challenge that requires a booster shot.

I am not a scientist. I certainly don't have a medical degree. I am not professing any expertise. But we do know that variations are emerging, and shame on us if they don't spur us to action as quickly as possible. We are in a life-and-death struggle, a race against the clock to vaccinate Americans against the variants before they become dominant.

The cost of the rescue plan that President Biden has proposed is \$1.9 trillion—about the same as the CARES plan that the Senate passed a year ago. We passed it with 96 votes a year ago. We passed some \$900 billion more this last December. This \$1.9 trillion is no small sum, but do you know what would be even more expensive? Continuing down this path of the pandemic, watching this deadly virus mutate and eat up companies and jobs and hope and education for our kids. Doing nothing is unacceptable. Doing too little is unacceptable.

Remember when you took your kids to the doctor with that earache or sore throat or whatever it was? He said: I will tell you what I can do, Dad. I am going to give you a prescription for your little child, and it is for 5 days on the antibiotic. Now, I have to warn you ahead of time that the child is going to start looking better and feeling better in 2 days and, in 3 days, will want to run outside and play with the other kids, and you are going to think, "Fine, that is behind us," but don't do it. Give that antibiotic all 5 days because we know, in many cases, if you stop giving the antibiotic, the illness returns.

A similar situation faces us with COVID-19. If we don't put enough into the vaccination effort, if we don't put enough into strengthening the economy, if we don't put enough into sustaining those unemployed and underemployed—if we don't put enough into this—we will be back again. It may not be \$1.9 trillion then. It may be even more. So shouldn't we take all of our medicine? Shouldn't we do it as most doctors and, in this case, economists order to make certain that we have a positive impact on the economy?

Now I want to say a word about the 10 Republican Senators who met with the President of the United States the day before yesterday.

I thank the President for the meeting because he was sincere, and I was told by those who attended that he was responsive to their questions, and he was well prepared. When they went in and started talking about the different programs and how much we should spend on each one, one Republican Senator said: He had a sheet of paper in front of him, with a few things written on it, and for 2 hours, we kept active conversation. It was like another Member of the Senate speaking to these 10 Republicans. That to me is gratifying. It is the reason I supported this man to become our President. I knew he would be ready for the job and anxious to try to bring America back together.

So the 10 Republicans who met with him have said they want to work on a bipartisan basis. Well, I know them. I know each and every one of them pretty well. I sat through those meetings with them before, when we prepared the last COVID relief bill. They are sincere. They are well prepared. They argue their cases. Even if I disagree with them, I respect the way they argue.

I would say to them there are two things that are critically important. First, respond quickly. We can't drag this out for weeks or months. It is unacceptable. We have deadlines looming in the middle of March when unemployment benefits are going to be cut off for many Americans, and we certainly have a vaccination crisis we have to address right now. Secondly, don't err on the side of stopping the medicine before you are really protected and well. We need to put the medicine into the economy. I am talking about the dollars—the money—into the economy to get people back to work so that schools can reopen, for goodness' sake. Anyone with a child or a grandchild knows this is unsustainable for these kids to be out of the classroom. It is hurting them, and it is holding them back in terms of their educations. It needs to end and end quickly.

So, to my Republican friends, thank you for joining us, but stick with us for a real solution to this. We can't delay. Every day we wait is another day that this virus mutates and grows stronger. Every day we delay, thousands of Americans die from this virus; businesses close; workers lose jobs; families get more desperate. This is terrific devastation we have lived through, but it can come out right in the end if we stick together on a bipartisan basis as a nation.

We are going to soon deal with the budget resolution here on the floor of the U.S. Senate and then move to reconciliation. I have tried my best, though I have been a Member of the Senate for a number of years, to understand reconciliation and, particularly, to understand the famous Byrd rule. It is named after a man who was a Senator for many years, from West Virginia, named Robert C. Byrd. He used to sit at that desk.

When he came to the floor, there was such respect for him and his knowledge of this institution that the standing order was people who were speaking stopped. Senator Byrd is here. Defer your remarks until he is finished. That was done over and over again. As a new Member of the Senate, I thought: Who is this man? Well, I came to understand the reputation which he had garnered in the U.S. Senate and he, I suppose—maybe others with him—was the author of the reconciliation process. Originally, it may have been intended—I underline "may"—for deficit reduction. Now it is something different. Deficit reduction is not the goal

per se. Instead, there have to be measurable revenues and losses involved in any proposal within reconciliation.

Holding to the Byrd rule is going to be a matter of interpretation by the Senate Parliamentarian and a decision by the Senate as to whether that interpretation will be respected. There could be items that are objected to by the Parliamentarian and others that will be accepted. I think it is too early to speculate on that, but it is one of the more arcane elements of the Senate rule process; yet it has a massive impact.

Years ago, when the Republicans were in similar positions as the Democrats, they used reconciliation for tax cuts. Some who believed that reconciliation dealt with deficit reduction could never understand how a tax cut wouldn't add to the deficit. They argued the other way. They prevailed. Reconciliation was used for a tax cut. Now we come up with a proposal, the American Rescue Plan, which either, in part or in whole, is going to be offered in reconciliation, and the question is whether each category of that plan that is included in reconciliation is eligible under the Senate rules.

I will say there is one fundamental difference which one of my colleagues raised earlier. Instead of talking about tax cuts for the wealthiest, we are proposing changes in the reconciliation for the American Rescue package by President Biden which are really designed to help working families and those who are struggling in our economy.

For instance, the tax changes that are proposed in the American Rescue Plan, if they are included in reconciliation, will include additional assistance to families with children. There will be substantial tax relief and tax credits—refundable tax credits—to those in poverty, raising children. We have economists who tell us that, if the Biden proposal on these tax benefits for families with children are enacted into law, we will cut child poverty in half in America. Think about that—a dramatic change.

We hear so many conversations about the state of the economy, of those who are being left behind, and whether or not income inequality is going to be addressed. Starting with the children, I will say to President Biden, is the right starting point. It would be wonderful if we had bipartisan support for helping these kids. I can tell you this: The money it costs for these tax cuts and credits is far less than the expense that would be incurred by America as a nation if these kids don't have an opportunity to grow up healthy, educated, and productive. So I am watching carefully as this debate continues.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, we are just weeks into a new administration, and all hopes and promise of bipartisanship have been rejected.

The Biden administration and my Democratic colleagues in the Senate lasted 10 days before they ditched any attempt at real compromise. Now, instead of working together to provide targeted relief to those who are hurting from the coronavirus pandemic, the Democrats are moving forward with a reconciliation process to pass a nearly \$2 trillion spending bill.

Reconciliation is a process that was created to make quick changes related to budget and spending that were assumed to have gotten bipartisan support. It was never meant to be a tool to pass major legislation, but the Democrats know they can't pass their harmful policies through legislation, so they are looking for any tool they can find to ram them through the process.

Senators SCHUMER and SANDERS keep pushing forward, without Republican support, to get the changes they need no matter what—no matter that the spending package includes a number of liberal policies that have nothing to do with the coronavirus; no matter that the spending package has a bailout of wasteful liberal States for their decades of mismanagement even though the latest data show that States across the country are reporting positive income growth; no matter that the \$2 trillion would throw our Nation even deeper into unsustainable debt, hurting American families.

We need to be very clear about this: America is in a debt crisis, and we need to start talking about it and taking decisive action to reverse course.

In 2020 alone, the Federal Government increased its debt by more than \$4 trillion. To date, it sits at a massive—an unsustainable—\$27 trillion. That is why, every time I am faced with a question of spending taxpayer dollars, I ask myself some simple yet important questions: What is the plan to pay for it? What is the return on investment for American families? Does the proposal include measures to prevent waste and fraud and ensure accountability?

Asking these questions isn't a novel idea. It is the same process I went through every day when I was the Governor of Florida, and it is what most Americans go through when making financial decisions at home or for their businesses. No family would needlessly spend money without a plan, and no business can afford to not get a return on its investment.

Spending without consequence isn't how things work in the real world, and it is not how things should work in government. Congress's decades of failure to think and act responsibly has led to enormous deficits—insurmountable debt—and out-of-control spending, but instead of getting serious about this debt and its inevitable consequences, the Democrats are focused on more government, more spending, higher taxes, and no accountability. Biden's nominees are no different.

In 2018, Janet Yellen, Biden's new Treasury Secretary, was quoted as

speaking about the unsustainable U.S. debt and said: "If I had a magic wand, I would raise taxes." How is that good for an American family?

Mayor Pete Buttigieg, the new Transportation Secretary, said he is open to raising the gas tax on American families. How is that good for an American family?

Neera Tanden, tapped to run the Office of Management and Budget, has been a vocal supporter of the Green New Deal—a \$93 trillion disaster that would devastate our economy and kill jobs. How is that good for an American family?

These are the people who are going to get our economy on track and provide opportunities for American families? I don't think so.

My concern about the future of our country cannot be understated. In August, Congress will have to deal with the expiration of the debt ceiling. This is a critically important issue, but, for years, Congress has ignored it. The debt ceiling has been suspended for more than 2 years, allowing the Federal Government to spend out of control and rack up insane debt on the Federal credit card, and we have to pay interest on this debt. Right now, interest rates are at historic lows—less than 1.5 percent—and we are still paying nearly \$350 billion in interest on our debt each year. Think about it. We get no return on any of these dollars.

Here is a chart. Look at this.

This is the \$345 billion we are going to spend in interest for 2020. Look at these programs: Medicare, 862; Medicaid; defense; Social Security. Look at the deficit we are running of \$3.3 trillion. If this interest rate goes up—and we were already running a big deficit even before COVID, and we are going to have a deficit this year of over \$1 trillion—what program does somebody anticipate cutting, and what taxes do people believe we ought to increase?

Of the \$350 billion we are going to spend on interest, we will get no return. There is no family that gets any benefit out of this interest expense unless you are holding treasuries. It is insane, but it is not the scariest part. If interest rates increase to the 50-year average of 6.2 percent—that is the 50-year average—we will be obligated to pay \$1 trillion more in interest every year. So look at this. If the interest rates go to the 50-year average, we are going to go from a little less than \$350 billion to over \$1 trillion in interest expense.

So if we have \$1 trillion in interest expense, how are we going to fund all these programs when we are already running deficits? And that is if the debt stops growing.

Every additional dollar in debt we hold increases the dollars in interest we owe. It is an awful cycle that has disastrous consequences for American families.

That is why we cannot allow the debt ceiling to simply be suspended again.

We cannot allow a radical liberal agenda to destroy America's chance to ever get out of this hole.

As we recover from the pandemic, inflation will rise from its 2020 low of 1.4 percent to nearly 2.3 percent or more. That is a 60-percent increase in inflation.

But if Congress continues to recklessly spend and do nothing about our growing debt, inflation will increase higher. There is a direct link between the Federal Government's unsustainable spending and the rising cost of goods and services.

Here is what that means for American families: The price of everyday goods will rise; gas prices will rise; and rental housing costs will increase.

Increases in inflation hit America's hourly workers and fixed-income families the hardest. And these hits are exacerbated when liberal politicians, like Pete Buttigieg, get their way and raise the gas tax and other costs on families.

So while politicians in Washington keep spending money like it is a game, American families suffer. Radical spending and reckless proposals directly hurt families.

Every dollar we allocate is borrowed from taxpayers, and if Congress is irresponsible, it is the taxpayers that suffer.

Adding insult to injury, a rise in the debt will also either cause or be accompanied by a rise in interest rates. That is bad for everyone.

When interest rates increase, everything from car loans, to student loans, to mortgages become more expensive for the American people.

And the interest on our debt, which is already the fourth largest expenditure in the Federal budget, will become our largest expenditure. For every 1-percent increase in interest rate, we are going to spend another \$2 trillion over 10 years. That is more taxpayer money getting no return. There is nothing. There are no services. There are no products. There is nothing for the American consumer.

For people on fixed incomes, their incomes are going to stay the same, while the prices of the items they buy will go up month after month. For hourly workers, wages will never go up fast enough to cover the ever-increasing cost of goods and services.

I know all of this sounds scary. That is because it is.

Politicians in Washington are afraid to tell you the truth, so here it is: If you want our country to survive and thrive and continue to be a beacon for freedom, prosperity, and hope around the world, we will need to make tough choices after this crisis is over. We will need to do way more with less. We will need to reassert the fundamental principle of conservatism that the private sector and individuals—not government—should be the driving forces behind our economic stability and success.

We have to stand up for these values, and when Democrats try to spend \$2

trillion on their priorities that have no bipartisan support, we have to say no. We have to make sure that every dollar is spent strategically on things that actually help struggling families and businesses.

When Democrats want to raise taxes to pay for government's wastefulness, we have to say no.

Short-term solutions aren't going to work anymore. We are in a battle for the future of our Nation, and we cannot relent.

As I stated after Congress passed the CARES Act, once this crisis is over, we must make a plan to cut Federal spending by at least the amount we spent during this crisis. There is no other option.

In August, Congress will once again confront the expiration of the debt ceiling. It is time to take action. It is time to wake up.

We can fix this and put our Nation on a fiscally responsible path. We fix this by doing what I did in Florida. We need to focus on growing the economy, cutting taxes and burdensome regulations, and streamlining permitting. We fix this by helping every American get a good job. And we fix this by getting a return on every taxpayer dollar we spend.

I am going to keep talking about this issue and proposing solutions because this is one of the most severe and most ignored crises facing our Nation. It is not going away, and the harder the Democrats push their wasteful, harmful proposal, the harder I am going to push back. This problem is only getting worse.

As long as I am a Member of the U.S. Senate, I will fight to rein in the out-of-control spending that is putting our children and our grandchildren's future at risk.

I will be back on this floor again and again until something gets done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). The Senator from Virginia.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about some friends of mine.

Roxie Raines Kornegay Allison. Roxie Raines Kornegay Allison, my across-the-street neighbor for nearly 30 years, died of COVID last Thursday night at 6 o'clock. Roxie has been kind of the matriarch and the pillar of our little four-block-long neighborhood.

We have the annual party in the median in October, and Roxie kind of presides. She has been sort of the caretaker, always taking care of a family member or a friend.

One of the first persons who reached out to me when Roxie passed was a city councilman in Pasadena, CA, who had heard instantaneously. He used to be the deputy police chief in Richmond. He said: When I moved to Richmond, I didn't know anybody. Roxie was the one who kind of adopted me and showed me the ropes in Richmond.

Roxie was a pioneer in Virginia government, making opportunities for African Americans to get hired in key positions—a civil rights leader in the State.

My wife and I and our whole neighborhood are just absolutely devastated by the loss. My wife and I were talking about: How old do you think Roxie is?

We always viewed her as sort of our age because she is so vigorous and fun and lively. She is 20 years older than my wife and me.

Three days before Roxie Raines Kornegay Allison died, another neighbor of mine, Sheila Mandt, who was 55 years old, died of COVID. Sheila was a dynamic activist in the Richmond community, with a real heart for non-profit organizations that focused on the needs of survivors of domestic violence. She had done pioneering work in that area and worked with other organizations too, like the Salvation Army and others.

She was married for a long time to another friend, Chris Hilbert, who had been a member of the Richmond City Council.

Three days before Sheila Mandt died of COVID, Patsy Arsenault died of COVID in Richmond. Patsy is the mother of my parish priest, Father Jim Arsenault. It is a tiny little parish in Richmond, and Patsy has been very much a part of our parish community.

So in 8 days, three people that I know died of COVID. And this morning, I heard early in the morning that another dear friend—and I am not going to mention his name, but another dear friend of mine—is in the hospital with COVID and on a ventilator. He is somebody I know very, very well. I officiated at his wedding about 15 years ago, when I was Governor.

I am a healthy and wealthy and privileged person, so if this is happening to me in my network of friends and family, I know it is happening to others. I think this now makes nine people I know who have died of COVID.

I was on the phone yesterday with Taiwan's representative to the United States—representative is essentially their equivalent of the Ambassador. She told me that Taiwan has had nine COVID deaths—dozens of miles from China. They have had nine COVID deaths. I haven't gone back to check that, but my wife and I have nine friends and family, including the mother-in-law of my brother, who have died of COVID.

We had 3,406 deaths yesterday in the United States to COVID. Basically, beginning on about December 20, the daily death toll in the United States to COVID has virtually every day eclipsed the number of Americans who were killed on 9/11. We have now eclipsed 447,000 deaths to COVID.

So my own feelings of sadness about my friends are just shared in common with everybody. Everybody has been touched by this—knowing somebody who is ill, knowing somebody who has died, maybe having COVID themselves,

maybe having lost a job, maybe having lost a business, maybe having not been able to go see a parent or grandparent in a nursing home or not been able to travel to see a brandnew grandchild. This touches everyone. It doesn't touch everyone equally. Those getting COVID and those dying of COVID are predominantly minorities. Those losing jobs to COVID are predominantly minorities, young people working at the lowest end of the salary scale.

So why do I take the floor to talk about Roxie and Sheila and Patsy and my other friend who I just learned this morning is on a ventilator in the hospital? I take the floor because this, to me, is just evidence underlined with an exclamation point that we have to act promptly to provide a suffering nation more COVID relief, and we shouldn't be stingy about it. We have to be bold about it because the amount of suffering people in this country are undergoing is still so staggering, nearly unprecedented.

The scale of the problem is so big, the health scale of the problem—that many deaths and millions having had COVID; the economic scale of the problem—we are still down 10 million jobs from where we were 1 year ago, and that is with some significant recovery occasioned by the investments that Congress has been willing to make in the first five bills that we passed. Even with those having had significant effect on our States and communities, we are still down 10 million jobs. And then we are also down in the intangibles. It is not just the number of cases, the number of deaths, the number of hospitalizations, the number of businesses that are closed, and the number of people who have lost jobs; it is the scale of sadness and unhappiness and the consequences that will go on for some significant period of time that we are still living under.

Here are two examples, and I could give 50, just as any Senator who stood on the floor could give 50 examples because we are all hearing this. The mental health needs of frontline healthcare workers—I had a Zoom session with doctors and nurses around the State not long ago, and the stories just break your heart.

One nurse said: You know, I am used to death. I mean, this is what I do. I have been a nurse for 20 years in this hospital, and I am sort of used to maybe one death per week on the shifts that I work. I am not used to three deaths on a shift day after day after day.

Another nurse jumped in from a different part of the State and said: That is right. Let me tell you what the hardest thing is for me.

The nurse said this: Maybe the most important thing I do as a healthcare provider is, when somebody is dying in the hospital, I escort their family into their room so that they can have some last moments together as a family sitting around the bedside and holding their hand or exchanging memories

with their parent or their spouse or a child or a sibling. You can't do that now. People dying from COVID—because of exposure risk, I can't make this place sort of a sacred place for family to say a last goodbye, so it is up to me to do it. I have to go in there, and I am wearing a mask; I can't even smile at the person. I am probably not even supposed to hold their hand, but I do anyway. And then what I do is I bring in my iPad, and I hold it a few inches from the dying person's face so that they can have an end-of-life discussion with family members who can't be there at their bedside and be there with them.

The nurses who told me this said this is really tough. It is tough to do it day after day after day and be the last person on Earth who so many people are seeing and trying to manage that really intimate and important sacred moment between a dying person and their family when they are gasping their last breath.

A third nurse then cut in and said: All those things are true. Let me tell you, for me, what is the hardest for my mental well-being in terms of doing this every day. I do what the other two have just described, and then I get done with the shift, and I am just beat, and I don't want to take that home to my family.

I don't want to take that frustration and depression home to my family, so I drive around for a while until I can kind of clear my head. Invariably, when I am driving around, I will go by someplace like a restaurant or a bar, and I will see a whole lot of people there with each other without masks on, people who think the mask thing is fake or it is a political thing, and they are making a statement by not wearing a mask and not following basic health guidelines.

After the day that I have gone through and the challenge to my own mental health in seeing this, I see that happening, and I am like: You are going to be in the hospital next week. Do you know what you are doing to yourself? Do you know what you are doing to your family? Do you know what you are doing to me? I am going to be having to hold that iPad in front of your face or maybe somebody else you are with as they talk to family.

The healthcare needs of our frontline healthcare workers who have been besieged by this pandemic—they are not going to go away the day we say we are past COVID. The challenges people have endured to be the heroes we claim them to be are not just going to immediately go away. Part of this COVID relief bill needs to be about keeping our own healers healthy.

A second example I will give quickly is housing. Thank goodness, in the COVID bills thus far, we have been able to find some bipartisan agreement to extend evictions—put a moratorium on evictions, put a moratorium on foreclosures for properties that have some Federal connection, financed through,

you know, Fannie or Freddie, or FHA. If they have a Federal nexus, we provide an eviction moratorium.

OK, that is really important, but what about when we get to the end of the moratorium? Families have big obligations that are backed up. Maybe they lost jobs or lost income. Can they come current then on their obligations when we are done with the moratorium, or will they then face eviction? After they have gone through the unimaginable of COVID and now we are past it, will they then face eviction because their resources will not be sufficient to catch them up with their backdue obligations?

It is not just the residents. What about the landlords? So many landlords of rental properties are small business owners, and they provide housing to families, and they have to pay off mortgages too. We also want them to keep the properties up, to keep them safe, to keep them habitable, to keep them as dignified places where people can live, but if rent isn't coming in to them, how can they pay off their own obligations? How can they keep up the quality of housing where people live?

I could have talked about the needs of the unemployed or the needs of people who use childcare. At one point in the summer, 40 percent of childcare institutions in this country were closed down. That makes it so hard to open our businesses. I could have talked about the tremendous needs of small businesses. Thank goodness it has been a bipartisan priority in all the bills we did in 2019 to prioritize small business assistance. These needs are intense.

There are some positive signs. Hospitalizations and cases are starting to go down even though the death toll remains high, but this challenge—we are not done with it. We are not near done with it, and that is why we have to go big, in my view, and that is why we have to do it with a sense of urgency.

I want to conclude and just say that the budget reconciliation tool that was part of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 is about doing big things with a sense of urgency. I am getting asked sometimes by press, as I wander around: Should you use reconciliation, or should you try to be bipartisan?

I said: Hold on a second. Reconciliation isn't partisan. Reconciliation was a part of the Budget Control Act put in place 35 years ago, and budget reconciliation has been used for some of the most bipartisan, positive achievements of Congressmen in recent decades. CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, was done with reconciliation. The earned income tax credit was done with reconciliation.

Reconciliation is a tool. You can use it in a bipartisan way or in a partisan way. It has also been used in a partisan way. The effort to undo the Affordable Care Act was done by reconciliation with no support on the Democratic side of the aisle. The tax cut bill in 2017 was done via reconciliation with no support

on the Democratic side of the aisle. But choosing the path of reconciliation is not the opposite of bipartisanship.

I so applaud President Biden and Vice President HARRIS for their earnest dialogue with our Republican colleagues, and I applaud my Republican colleagues for going to the White House and talking about what should be in this bill because as they share their priorities, they are going to shape this bill.

Without having seen the bill—I know no one has—I can make a guarantee about this bill, and I am 100 percent sure I am right about this. When this bill hits the table and the negotiation is done and before we have a final passage vote on it and we analyze what is in the bill, we are going to see so many priorities in this bill that are not just Democratic priorities but that are Republican priorities, too, things that were drawn from bills that Republicans introduced or that Republicans cosponsored with Democrats, things that were raised by Republican Senators in their dialogue with President Biden and with us. We are going to see a bill that meets the need of Americans who are suffering to do something big and to do something urgent and includes priorities that were Republican Senators' priorities, that are good for Republican voters, and that are good for all Americans.

So this is the second time I have done a floor speech where I have gone over the names of people whom I know who died of COVID. I don't want to do a third speech. I don't want to do a third speech. I think it is important to say people's names so we remember them and we honor them. But the best way we can honor them is not through a floor speech; the best way we can honor them is acting in a compassionate and prompt and significant way to ease the suffering of Americans during this most unprecedented time.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I want to say what a pleasure it is to see the Presiding Officer in the Chair and to know that, together, we have the opportunity, the great privilege, to represent the greatest State in America—the State of Colorado. And welcome to the Chamber. It is great to have you here.

S. CON. RES. 5

Mr. President, I want to talk a little bit about our State. The last time I was running for office, 2016, I remember I went to Rifle, CO, which the Presiding Officer knows well, and I met there with a group of moms who were showing off the early childhood center

that was there. It was newly created, and they were extremely happy to have it because before that early childhood center was there, in order to get childcare or early childhood education for their kids, these moms were having to drive through the canyon to Glenwood Springs—about 35 miles away, I guess, or so—and then go to work and then go back and pick their kid up and bring them back. So they were very, very happy that it was there.

But at a certain point during the conversation, one of the moms looked at me, and she said: Michael, I work so I can have health insurance. And every single dollar I make goes to pay for this early childhood center so I can work—that triangle that she is trapped in because of the compression of wages in this country that is a story that millions of American families can tell about an economy that, for 50 years, has worked really well for the people at the very top but not for anybody else.

Ninety percent of the American people, basically, for 50 years, have not seen a pay increase in this country in real terms. That is terrible for them, obviously, because they can't afford health care, housing, higher education, or early childhood education. They feel like they can't live a middle-class life or, if their kids are living in poverty, they can't get their kids out of poverty.

It is a danger to our democracy because democracies do not do well when prosperity is not shared and when you have one group of people at the very top who are doing extremely well and everybody else is struggling to get by, everybody else is struggling to get into the middle class or stay in the middle class or lift their kids out of poverty. That is where we have been as a country for a long time.

We have some of the lowest mobility rates of any industrialized economy in the world, and it is taking its toll. It is taking its toll on the American dream, and that is before COVID. COVID has made matters much, much worse for families in our State—for families in urban parts of the State and rural parts of the State.

Even before COVID hit, when people would ask me—I used to be the superintendent of the Denver Public Schools—people would say: What has changed in education since you were superintendent until now, what I would tell people is mental health, mental health, mental health. That is what teachers talk about in the meetings that I have with them—the mental health of their students, the mental health of their families, and their own mental health. It comes up in every single conversation before class size, before how pitifully we pay teachers in this country. We have to confront that as a country now, too, on top of everything else.

And the economic inequality is greater. The folks who have been on the frontlines during this pandemic have had the toughest time economi-

cally of everybody. That is why I am so glad that the administration has come with the package that they have to this floor, \$1.9 trillion—\$1 trillion of which is direct aid to families and another big piece of which is to support the public health infrastructure in this country so that we can actually vaccinate people in a timely way, so we can test people in a timely way, so we can distribute PPE.

It has been shocking to see how poor the response has been from the United States, a developed country unable to contend effectively with this pandemic, and we have lost almost half a million Americans as a result.

So that investment in our public health infrastructure—in effect, the health force, like the one that KRISTEN GILLIBRAND and I have proposed—is something we desperately need if we are going to reopen this economy quickly and if we are going to reopen schools and keep them open.

There is one other piece of this I wanted to mention this morning on the floor, and that is the provision in this bill that is based on the work that I have done for many, many years with Senator SHERROD BROWN from Ohio. One bill is Bennet-Brown, and the other one is Brown-Bennet. I love both of them the same, even though the order is different.

But the President has decided to include these bills in his package. It is a dramatic increase to the child tax credit, a substantial increase to what is called the childless earned-income tax credit, so we will stop taxing working people into poverty, which is what we are doing in this country today.

With the passage of the American Family Act, this child tax credit alone, we will cut childhood poverty in the United States of America by almost 50 percent. We will cut childhood poverty for Latino kids by 60 percent, for Black kids by more than 50 percent, for kids living in Tribes by more than 60 percent without adding one bureaucrat to the Federal Government, without creating one more program. Just by taking the tax credit from \$2,000 to \$3,000, \$3,600 for kids under the age of 6, by making it fully refundable, which means that the poorest people in America who have been left out of this tax credit—23 or 25 million children—now will have the benefit of the tax credit for the first time, we will cut childhood poverty in this country by almost 50 percent. I can't think of anything that we could do that would better recognize the structural nature of the challenges that the American people are facing in this economy before COVID but, certainly, in the wake of COVID.

I hope the proposal will be able to attract bipartisan support in this Chamber, and that once we have done it, that we will make it permanent, we will make it last, and that we will imagine that we could live in a country in the United States of America that actually has eradicated childhood poverty because it is no American's choice

to be born poor. It is no child's choice to be born poor.

There are many things we can do to improve economic mobility in this country, and I think that this new administration is going to create the beginning of an era that is going to lead us to a place that, when the economy grows, it grows for everybody—not just for people at the very top—and that families can move themselves up through hard work, save something for retirement, and leave something for the next generation.

That is all anybody in this country has ever really wanted, and that hasn't been true for most Americans for a very long time. This is the beginning of change in that, and that is why this bill has my enthusiastic support.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ENERGY POLICY

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the importance of the American energy sector and my concern about President Biden's Executive orders regarding domestic energy policy.

In the first hours of the Biden administration, the President signed an Executive order revoking the Presidential permit of the Keystone XL Pipeline, a project projected to add 11,000 American jobs this year and pump \$1.6 billion in wages into our economy. The new administration's actions ceased construction work, nullified contracts issued last October to hire an estimated 7,000 union construction workers, and disappointed our Canadian ally.

It is deeply concerning that our national energy policy should take such a dramatic turn away from pro-jobs and pro-American energy independence. Americans' unemployment rate is already in a precarious situation due to the ongoing global pandemic, and I fail to see how destroying more jobs unifies our Nation.

Mississippians and Americans in the energy industry have worked tirelessly for our Nation, and in 2019 America became energy independent for the first time in 60 years. It is thanks to our energy workers that we are no longer forced to rely on foreign powers who do not wish America well.

Terminating the Keystone XL Pipeline was just the start of what we now recognize to be a concerted effort to bring down fossil fuel resources in our Nation. The administration's subsequent ban on new oil and gas leases on Federal lands will result in an estimated \$33.5 billion in lost GDP across Western States in President Biden's first term and risk over \$8.8 billion annually in conservation funding.

Oil and natural gas from Federal lands accounted for 6.4 percent and 9.2 percent, respectively, of the Nation's total production. Jobs and economic opportunity are being carelessly stripped away.

And while my State may not be burned by the Federal leasing ban as badly as Wyoming, New Mexico, and other Western States, Mississippi will certainly feel the heat from this. Mississippi has a significant energy infrastructure which provides thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in economic output.

The Gulf of Mexico is one of the Nation's most important regions for energy resources and accounts for a large portion of our crude oil and Federal offshore natural gas production.

My State is home to the 1,443-megawatt Grand Gulf nuclear power station in Port Gibson, MS, which is the largest reactor in terms of generating capacity in the United States. We host a large petroleum refinery, a natural gas processing plant, and a liquefied natural gas terminal located along the State's Gulf of Mexico coastline.

Additionally, the Red Hills surface coal mine provides lignite coal to the Red Hills Power Plant, creating jobs and generation capacity in North Mississippi. Along with these great resources, Mississippi has growing investments in natural gas and in solar power.

Destructive policies that make fuel sources more difficult to obtain could greatly harm economic growth and raise the cost of energy prices, which will ultimately harm low-income families and many small businesses, not just in Mississippi but across the entire Nation.

My concerns are not based on any objections to green or renewable energy sources. I believe the American people want balanced national energy policies that promote growth and price stability. However, the early actions of the Biden administration are cause for concern and not a source of unity. They signal a troubling willingness to sacrifice strategic industries that are important to our economy and for the jobs that they provide.

This body should take into consideration important legislation such as the POWER Act and the Conservation Funding Protection Act, which would allow Congress to enact responsible energy policies and move away from policies landed in executive edits.

During a time when America's energy businesses are seeking recovery from this global pandemic, losing precious jobs that keep the lights on for the constituents and feed their families cannot and should not be the route this administration is taking.

TRIBUTE TO SARAH THOMAS

Mr. President, now on a more positive note, I would like to speak on a separate and special matter.

As Americans and people around the world settle in front of their televisions this Sunday to watch the 55th

annual Super Bowl, they will be tuning in to a historic event. I am not speaking about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the game or Tom Brady's record Super Bowl appearances. Instead, I am focused on the history that will be made by an exceptional woman from Mississippi, my good friend Sarah Thomas.

Sarah Thomas, a native of Pascagoula, MS, will go down in sports history on Sunday as the first woman to officiate the Super Bowl.

Sarah has always had a passion for athletics. She made a name for herself in high school sports. She became an Academic All-American in basketball at the University of Mobile, where she amassed a career record of 779 points, 441 rebounds, 108 assists, and 192 steals—accomplishments that illustrate her determination to perform at the highest levels.

While the news of a female officiant for the Super Bowl is a historic first, Sarah is no stranger to making history. Following college, Sarah's attention shifted to football—namely, officiating games. She quickly earned a reputation as an elite referee while officiating high school games.

Sarah became the first woman to officiate a Division 1A high school game in Mississippi. Sarah continued to do so well in her craft that it caught the attention of renowned NFL official Gerry Austin, who invited her to an officials' camp. Here again, Sarah's talents proved impressive, and she soon became the first woman to officiate a college football game and the first woman to officiate a college bowl game.

The NFL hired Sarah as its first female official in 2015, and in 2019 she became the first woman to officiate an NFL playoff game.

To me and many others, Sarah's selection to officiate at Super Bowl LV is just a natural progression for a talented professional. I can assure you, anyone who knows Sarah as I do will not be surprised by her successful career.

Sarah—a mother, a career woman—has all the qualities I imagine the NFL wants in a good official: smart, confident, decisive, reliable, and committed.

My State of Mississippi is extremely proud of Sarah Thomas, and we look forward to watching her latest history-making appearance at the Super Bowl.

And to Sarah's children—these precious children: Bridley, Brady, and Bailey—congratulations to you on this historic achievement, and you can be so proud of your mother.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, this week, the Senate is engaged in what I personally believe to be a disappointing exercise of, really, partisan political power at the expense of American taxpayers.

When it became clear that the Senate was going to be split 50-50—by the way, it doesn't get closer than that—there was a moment of hope, I think, on both sides that this would be the opportunity that we would all have to really begin to seek ways to find how we could work together and not have any 50-50 votes and not keep the Vice President busy in breaking ties on votes. So far, that hope appears to be a little bit short-lived.

We are supposedly voting to pass a budget right now that expresses the priorities of the Congress on how limited tax dollars should be allocated. Now, you don't have to be a genius to figure out that passing a budget—October, November, December—4 months into the calendar of the budget year probably isn't, technically, just to determine how you are going to allocate limited tax dollars. Frankly, there seems to be very little discussion in this budget about limited tax dollars. What we are really doing here is passing a budget that allows us to set up what, I think, is an ill-advised, partisan moment, where one side believes it can do whatever it wants to without the other side.

President Biden, when campaigning, said over and over again that he wanted to work with Republicans. I actually believe that is true. In his inaugural address, he said: "We have never ever, ever, ever failed in America when we've acted together." Now, the inaugural address was only a few days ago. Here we are, 2 weeks later, and the President and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have decided to go forward, and the only way to go forward is to go forward their way. If that happens to be the way forward, it is going to be a long 4 years, and for the majority, it might be a pretty quick 2 years because I don't think that this is the message that people sent on election day—that they wanted one side to be able to do whatever it wanted to do. We have the narrowest House majority in about 150 years, and the Senate majority—again, I will say—couldn't be closer than it is.

We haven't finished taking down the platform from the inauguration, and our colleagues are already forcing a one-sided endgame. Now, I would suggest that the endgame in this case really just sets the stage for the rest of the time we are going to be trying to work together, and I think we will look back and find out it didn't set the stage in a helpful way.

The plan is to muscle through a really partisan \$1.9 trillion package that claims to be about COVID relief but covers really a number of totally unrelated things.

People have talked a lot about the fact that the minimum wage is there and whether it would meet the standard of reconciliation.

We haven't talked very much about the fact that the education money in the proposal that we are looking at for reconciliation doesn't include private

schools, even private parochial schools. It doesn't include the schools that more than any other have done their best to stay open during the pandemic. It really breaks a pattern of recent years for all schools and post-World War II for higher education to where public schools was not the defining thing. The defining thing was, if you could qualify for government assistance, you were able to take it to any accredited institution that you wanted to.

Clean energy is in the COVID relief package. COVID relief is different from clean energy. It is certainly a debate worth having, but let's not suggest that it is COVID relief when it is not.

If one-half of the Senate is determined to impose its will on the other half without even working to find a real path forward, I think that is an unfortunate sign.

Democrats have said there is an urgent need for this COVID relief—so urgent we can't wait to have a real debate. You know, we just passed \$900 billion in relief. Now we are beginning to talk about such big numbers here that suddenly \$900 billion is sort of passed away as, well, that is not nearly enough. But the truth is, the \$900 billion bill was just signed into law December 27. That was 5 weeks ago—\$900 billion. Most of that money remains unspent, and suddenly we want to spend another \$1.9 trillion. That is an aggressive pace even by the standards of some of my friends in the other half of this Chamber or the other half of Congress.

It really in so many ways is simply too soon to really know exactly what we need next. We haven't taken the time yet to get the other money out of the door. We haven't taken the time to see how it is going and whether the policies we planned are the policies that really work. We haven't taken the time to decide what else we might need to do.

But here is what we have done already: We have provided \$8.75 billion to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for vaccine distribution. So far, they have released \$3 billion of that money. So we are rushing with billions more when 5.75 of that 8.75 amount of money for vaccine distribution hasn't been released yet. With nearly \$6 billion left in that fund, how do we know exactly how it is working or exactly how much we need? We seem to be sure that what we have isn't enough. I am not sure we even know that yet. But I have been an advocate in every one of the bills we have done for money for distribution of the vaccine, and I would love to see how the money that is out there works.

We need to be thinking about what to do next, but there was a time when debate was part of the Senate. Debate was very much part of the Senate when President Biden served in it. It should be part of the Senate now.

Frankly, if we debated and figured out a bipartisan plan, we would get

that done quicker than reconciliation. It is going to be several weeks before we can have the vote that we could have had to provide part of this money right now. A significant amount of this money is agreed to, particularly the amount that does relate to vaccine purchase and vaccine distribution. The parts that relate to testing, the parts that relate to getting kids back to school—that could all be available in a couple of weeks. But it won't be a couple of weeks when we go through this process of reconciliation that I think my friends on the other side will find out is harder to do than they thought and substantially harder to do in a 50-50 Senate than it would be anywhere else.

You know, in December, we provided \$82 billion for schools and for education. Elementary schools that were supposed to get almost \$70 billion of that money to reopen haven't reopened. Many of them haven't had a chance to spend the money. In fact, many of the K-12 schools haven't even spent all the money they got in April. So money from April not yet being spent, and we are rushing to decide how much more money they need right now in these last few weeks of the school year.

Last week, Dr. Fauci said in an interview that it was the goal of President Biden to get K-8 students back to school in the next 100 days, but at another event that same day, he said—maybe as truthfully as you could possibly be—it might not work out that way. We need to be really committed to getting kids back to school.

Now, there are more than a million people who have lost their jobs in education at the State and local level since the pandemic started. That is often given as the reason we need more State and local money. But many of that million-person number were the busdrivers, the cafeteria workers, the coaches, the support staff who, frankly—if you are not going to school, most districts have decided they shouldn't be paying that staff who is not part of what the school is doing right now. Those losses are not about loss of revenue; they are really about the loss of in-person school.

You know, I have served as the chairman of the Labor, Health, and Education Subcommittee in Appropriations. I am now the top Republican in that 50-50 committee. Last year, our subcommittee provided funding for schools that would help them address the pandemic and reopen. We provided money to develop and distribute vaccines and treatments. We provided money to continue critical funding for programs to address substance abuse and mental health and suicide and things that have been a real problem for an isolated, pandemic-bound population.

We need to do all of those things. I am more than happy to be part of that discussion. I want to help meet these

challenges. I have hope the administration understands that. I believe my colleagues on the other side of the aisle understand that. But we need to be sure that we know what we are doing before we commit another \$1.9 trillion, as if that money is really—I am hearing occasionally—not nearly enough. Two trillion more dollars after five bipartisan bills that produced real results, just kind of out of hand not nearly enough?

Now, that is easier to say because virtually nobody in this Chamber or in the country, including me, really has a concept of how much money \$1.9 trillion is. So it is easy to say “Well, it should be 2.9 or 3.9” or “Whatever it is, it is not enough” because we really, I don’t think, have a sense of how much it is.

We have had real success in developing vaccines. We need to have more success in getting out those vaccines.

I have not seen the administration or my colleagues on the other side of the aisle make the case yet as to why we need to spend the amount of money they are talking about spending. I have not seen anyone make the case of why it is good to start off this administration and this term of Congress in the most partisan, one-sided way possible before we have really had a chance to talk this out.

There are a lot of things here we agree on. There are a lot of things here that could be improved around the margins, but you have to have the willingness to talk about that before it goes forward.

I was glad to see the White House accepted the offer of 10 of our Republican colleagues to at least meet and talk about some bipartisan issues, but the unwillingness of the Democratic leader here to slow down this process made it clear that, really, there may not be that much interest in really trying to find a solution, but at least there was some interest in talking about trying to work together.

Bipartisanship is not something you do just for show. Compromise is not “my way or the highway.” Unity is not telling everyone else that the only option is to accept your side of the argument.

I hope my colleagues think better of this bipartisan exercise, come to the table, and explain what we really need and why we need it. If they don’t, I hope we can still figure out how to recover and move forward in the only way a 50-50 Senate can move forward, and that is working every day to find things that more than 50 Members—and I would hope substantially more than 50 Members—of the U.S. Senate agree on and send those to the President and get our work done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Iowa.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Ms. ERNST. Madam President, on January 20, I joined my colleagues on the front steps of the Capitol for the

inauguration of our 46th President, Joe Biden. At a time when divisions run deep within our country, I thought President Biden’s call for unity, where he pledged to be a President for all Americans, struck just the right tone.

As my Democratic colleagues in this body can attest to, I am always willing to work with anyone—Republicans, Democrats and Independents—on issues that will improve the lives of my fellow Iowans and all Americans. Sadly, the actions we have seen in the first few days of this administration do not seem to honor the promise President Biden made to Americans throughout his campaign and again on Inauguration Day.

In just 2 weeks, the President has already signed over 25 Executive orders, that is a significantly more amount than any President in recent history in a short amount of time. Let’s be clear, folks. He is not just breaking norms, he is obliterating them. Even the New York Times editorial board called on him to “Ease up on the Executive Actions.” And they are not wrong, folks. That is something that I don’t say very often.

Now, I fully understand that the power of Executive order is often unpopular when your party does not control the White House, but when you set out to be a “unifier-in-chief,” which is something we hoped President Biden would be, one would hope that the actions you take would unify or at least be a little more mainstream.

The reality is, that has just not been the case. What the new President has done in just 2 weeks on the job is show us his true colors and his desire to appease the more radical wing of his party. It is disheartening for someone who believes that the way we should be working together is a bipartisan path.

We have already seen disastrous decisions harmful to American businesses and workers—decisions that resemble the likes of the radical Green New Deal.

Keeping our air and water clean and protecting our environment for generations to come are shared concerns of every Iowan and all Americans. But on day one, as many predicted he would do at some point during his tenure, President Biden issued a harsh punishment for American businesses by rejoining the Paris climate agreement. This agreement saddles hard-working folks with overburdensome government regulations, all while letting one of the world’s biggest polluters, Communist China, completely off the hook. Instead of inhibiting economic growth, we should be focused on reducing our emissions and meeting our energy needs through market-driven, innovative solutions.

Iowa actually leads the way in creating renewable energy sources, from wind and solar to biodiesel and ethanol, but we haven’t done it through heavyhanded government mandates.

The President has also raised concerns for folks in my home State of

Iowa who work hard to grow and produce clean ethanol and biodiesel with his recent action to begin transitioning Federal Government vehicles to electric vehicles.

Ethanol and biodiesel are actually cleaner choices of fuel for folks at the pump. A recent study found that greenhouse gas emissions from corn ethanol are 46 percent lower than gasoline. At the same time, renewable fuels provide for the livelihoods of folks across the heartland.

It is critical we continue to invest in our biofuel industry, not move away from it. That is why I urge President Biden not to give in to the misguided political demands of the left. Change course and, instead, promote the adoption of higher biofuel blends and invest in expanding biofuel infrastructure.

On the same day he got us back into the Paris climate accord, President Biden unilaterally canceled the Keystone XL Pipeline, destroying thousands of jobs during a pandemic when millions of hard-working Americans are already struggling to make ends meet. Even Canada’s Prime Minister, one of our top allies and closest trade partners, expressed his disappointment in the decision.

Unfortunately, the Green New Deal lite is not the only policy of the liberal left the Biden administration has already chosen to implement. As many Iowans know, I have long been working to pass Sarah’s Law, my bill in honor of Sarah Root, a 21-year-old Iowan who was tragically struck and killed by Edwin Mejia, who entered the country illegally and was driving drunk—three times the legal limit.

While Mejia was initially detained by local law enforcement and faced State charges of motor vehicle homicide, a loophole in immigration policy under the Obama-Biden administration allowed him to post bond, disappear, and escape justice.

Sarah’s Law would close that loophole and require U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement to take custody of an illegal immigrant who is charged with a crime resulting in the death or serious bodily injury of another person. It is common sense, folks, and it would prevent tragedies like what happened to the Root family from ever happening again.

The Trump administration was successful in implementing parts of this important legislation. But as many expected, the Biden administration is already working to roll back immigration enforcement. That is why, last week, I reintroduced Sarah’s Law with the support of 19 of my colleagues—more than ever before—and I am going to keep fighting to get this bill across the finish line.

If the November elections taught us anything, it is that the American people want us to work together. They elected a 50-50 Senate and a slim majority in the House of Representatives.

So, Mr. President, it is time the Biden administration follows its own advice.

I am an eternal optimist, and I believe we can come together and truly deliver for all Americans, but I need my colleagues across the aisle and our new President to do the same so that his calls for unity don't fall on deaf ears.

MARCH FOR LIFE AND ABORTION

Madam President, on another topic, we did have the March for Life this past week. So I want to begin today by recognizing the grassroots advocates of our pro-life movement.

Last Friday, thousands of Americans and many Iowans joined in this year's virtual March for Life. These folks are the ones who actively serve our vulnerable women and families who need support in order to choose life. These hard-working Americans are the ones who are on the ground, changing hearts and minds all year long.

Even though things looked a lot of different for this year's event, I have no doubt that our grassroots pro-life movement will continue to grow in communities all across the country, thanks to these inspiring folks who understand that protecting life is not just a political issue for debate.

In DC, lawmakers and executive branch bureaucrats get easily trapped into looking at abortion as just another issue. But that mindset, even from the pro-life perspective, is a dehumanized approach. I challenge my friends and colleagues on both sides of the aisle to instead approach the sanctity of human life as more than just a policy issue.

Surely, the challenges of 2020 reminded us how very precious life is, taking to heart that we must cherish life—all life at all stages. If we devalue life in the womb, then we are only setting the groundwork for diminishing human worth and value at every other stage of life.

This mindset is why I approach the duty to protect life with steadfast determination. And it is why I know preserving life is a cause that can and should bring us together.

President Biden and his administration have clearly stated their goal is to unify our country, but the recent policy changes and Executive actions surrounding the abortion issue have certainly signaled a different message to many Americans.

There was a time when the most basic policy stance was that taxpayer dollars should not support the abortion industry. It was a bipartisan, non-controversial stance—one that many of my Democratic colleagues used to hold. But the abortion lobby has moved the goalpost so far down the field by making commonsense safety regulations on abortion absolutely untouchable; whereas, my pro-life colleagues and I have always been willing to meet in the middle. Think about it.

I believe life begins long before 5 months in the womb, but we know many colleagues feel differently. So Senator GRAHAM has repeatedly brought the Pain-Capable Unborn Child

Protection Act forward each Congress in the hopes that protecting our most vulnerable from painful death at the 5-month mark of pregnancy would be a unifying and humanitarian cause.

Sadly, that has not been the case. We had an estimated 143 babies who died between 2003 and 2014 after surviving abortion attempts. This shows the current law obviously needs to be strengthened there, which is why Senator SASSE brought forward the Born Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act—but, no, even that bar was too high.

Last year, Senator COTTON and I first introduced a bill that would ensure we have complete and accurate abortion-related data from every State. Wouldn't a full picture of the abortion landscape in our country be knowledge that any lawmaker would want in order to make informed and responsible decisions? And when it comes to ensuring women are treated with dignity and respect as patients, I will be introducing the Informed Consent Act to solidify this commonsense cause.

My colleagues may recall a whistleblower report from September 2020, claiming that hysterectomies and other sterilization procedures were being performed on immigrant women held at the Irwin County Detention Center in Georgia without their consent.

As it turns out, a sterilization or abortion procedure that occurs without informed consent from the patient is not already established as a crime in our Federal Code. My House colleague, Congressman CHRIS SMITH, and I are introducing this legislation to strengthen the law here. Surely, this is another baseline that we can find common ground on. I welcome my pro-choice colleagues to join us in this effort and take a step toward unity.

I believe once you focus the heart and mind to approach life as more than just a policy issue, you will find that preserving life promotes unity.

If you really look at how our culture is shifting, life is winning. At the State level, nearly 60 life-affirming laws were enacted across the country in 2019. The vast majority of Americans agree that Federal tax dollars should not be used to support the abortion industry.

So, folks, we do have common ground to stand on going into this new Congress. Protecting life brings us together, so we must stand up for the most vulnerable. We will be a stronger nation for it.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, yesterday, I had the opportunity to speak with a group about the legislative priorities for this upcoming Congress. I know the Presiding Officer and I are two Members of the Senate who like talking to the people we represent and doing that as much as we possibly can. I always try to cover as much

ground as I can when I am visiting with a group.

But what has struck me recently, and this was true yesterday, is that the conversation really started to center around our national security—protecting this Nation—and people seem to have defending this country on their brain—standing up for America.

Some of the things that come up are what they have noticed since November. You have individuals who are now a part of the new administration working hard to try to erase every trace of the Trump era, even the successes—legislation, many times, that moved forward and things that were done on a bipartisan basis.

Part of the problem that people are beginning to have is that President Biden signed off on more day 1 Executive orders and actions than any President in recent memory. Indeed, I think you would have to go back to the time of Ronald Reagan and combine all of those day 1 Executive orders and actions to equal what President Biden has done.

I have a tendency to say they kind of lost the ability to keep track of them because there are so many. They are numerous—every single day—and this has people very unsettled. They see this strategy, and they think this is oddly familiar. Their most powerful leaders are treating policymaking like it is some kind of graduate seminar—all about theories and not about consequences and not about concrete outcomes, at least not as far as Washington is concerned.

The message flowing from the White House hasn't helped ease their concerns. You see, the administration has given the impression that when it comes to national security policy, they are going to exercise strategic patience when engaging with our adversaries. And I will tell you this: Tennesseans back home might not know all the details of what is in store, but they know that the tone has changed, and they don't like what they are hearing.

When strategic patience failed to yield results during the President Obama administration, analysts dubbed this tactic as strategic passivity, and I believe that is a very apt description because at the heart of strategic patience is the belief that the status quo, while less than ideal, is better than many possible consequences of taking an action.

It is a dangerous posture, especially when applied to powerful adversaries like China that are positioning themselves for global dominance. In fact, our regional allies in Japan and the Philippines immediately expressed concern at the idea that the United States of America would embrace such a tactic.

For the past few decades, they have had a front row seat for the rise of Chinese influence. They watched as China grew from a struggling regional player into our most significant competitor in every domain. It is important to realize that we allowed that evolution in

the hopes that China's transition into a developed nation would foster within its leaders a sense of global responsibility. This approach failed, and now China is a major international player intent—intent—on global domination.

I can tell you that officials in Beijing are not taking a passive approach in their effort to surpass us. Through their Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese Communist Party has bought or extorted control over the economies of some of the most strategically important nations on the planet. Until recently, their grasp on global supply chains flew well under the radar.

But we can no longer ignore the negative consequences of Beijing's control over access to active pharmaceutical ingredients and prescription drugs to medical devices, natural resources, telecommunications equipment, and, even more, defense materials. Where they couldn't buy influence, the Chinese Communist Party seized it. If they could not buy it, they seized it. They took it outright by reducing themselves to intellectual property theft and money laundering schemes and, more subtly, by installing Confucius Institutes in American classrooms and universities and putting Chinese Communist Party spies on those university campuses in research positions.

Beijing is just as brash militarily. Chinese aggression and violence in the Indo-Pacific threatens regional stability in defiance of basic global norms, rulings offered by international bodies, and showings of strength from Western military players. The Chinese Communist Party has leveraged all of this against the most powerful nations in the Western world, and their belligerence has paid off.

Even when, time and again, news breaks of some human rights horror in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, or Tibet, global leaders hit the brakes on their rebuke of human rights violations because it could draw economic consequences.

The term "strategic patience" had been used by now-Secretary Austin prior to his confirmation. We discussed that, both privately and during his recent confirmation hearing, and I am confident he knows how important it is to check Chinese aggression now—right now—before it is too late.

However, the general language used by the Biden administration officials in press conferences and other settings reflects former President Obama's liberal theories rather than concrete policies. Now, to be clear, I think I can speak for everyone here when I say that we are willing to work with the administration on this, but the threat from China isn't merely theoretical, and I hope I have made it clear that we here in the Senate aren't prepared to treat it like it is.

For decades, Chinese Communist Party officials have been successful in using China's modernized economy to distract from the threat their aggressive tactics pose to the international

order. The fact is, the concept of strategic patience simply does not apply to Beijing.

The CCP's influence grows by the day and far too quickly to be contained by a cautious wait-and-see attitude. We did wait. We tried. It did not work. We know it did not work. We see the entanglements and the risk of simply poking at those knots and hoping they will resolve themselves. Instead, we need to take a great power competition-tailored approach right up to the CCP's front door and craft policy and budget priorities to match.

To those who would still embrace the kind of restraint the White House seems to have endorsed, I would ask: What about the status quo looks sustainable to you when you are dealing with the aggressiveness of the Chinese Communist Party?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, 2 weeks ago, I heard these words:

History, faith, and reason show the way, the way of unity. We can see each other not as adversaries but as neighbors. We can treat each other with dignity and respect. We can join forces, stop the shouting, and lower the temperature. For without unity, there is no peace, only bitterness and fury.

President Biden's inaugural address had some pretty glowing terms. I am grateful to hear statements about unity. The challenge now is to actually live that out and see that actually done, because while those words are beautiful, over the past 2 weeks, there have been almost two dozen hyperpartisan Executive orders that have come out of the White House, and there doesn't seem to be a push toward actual bipartisan unity here on this floor.

In fact, in the first 10 days of the Biden administration, he has signed more Executive orders than the last four Presidents combined in their first 10 days. President Clinton signed 2; President Bush signed 2; Donald Trump signed 7; President Obama signed 9; and Joe Biden, in the first 10 days, signed 22 Executive orders—22. And some of those Executive orders seem to be purely spiteful, just to say: President Trump put this in, so it must be bad.

Let me give you an example. The Trump administration required, through an Executive order, every Agency to compile all their guidance documents into one place so that small business owners and people who work in small businesses could find the Federal requirements from each Agency in one spot. They didn't have to hunt all over the place to be able to find their Federal requirements. Now, that

doesn't seem like a partisan statement. That just seems like good government. But in the first 10 days of President Biden's term, he got rid of that good guidance piece and said: No, Federal agencies can go back to playing hide and seek with their rules again, and small business owners will just have to figure out where it is. There won't be one place in each agency to find guidance.

Why would you do that, other than just, if Trump did it, it must be bad?

Listen, we have to find ways to actually live unity and to be able to do what is best for the American people. We live in a constitutional system. We have more than 300 million people. We have great disagreements on policies, but we come together to work them out.

During 2020, in a time of divided government, this body, the House of Representatives, and the White House passed five different COVID relief bills, all with strong bipartisan majorities. We passed all 12 appropriation bills with strong bipartisan majorities. I didn't agree with everything on every one of those bills, but we worked together to be able to resolve it. And now, suddenly, it has become a "we don't want to talk across the aisle anymore," literally 2 weeks after saying: Do you know what we need as a country? Unity.

Two weeks later it is: How do we cram through something on a straight partisan vote? How do we block out all Republican voices from the entire country and make sure their voices are not heard?

Does that feel like unity, 2 weeks into a Presidency?

Ten of my Republican colleagues sat down with President Biden. We appreciate his time, and he gave 2 hours of his time to listen.

He has proposed \$1.9 trillion in additional spending the very first day on COVID—\$1.9 trillion. This is only a few weeks after we just passed almost a trillion-dollar package dealing with COVID. Literally, two-thirds of that trillion-dollar package has not even gone out the door yet, has not even been spent, has not even been allocated.

There are billions and billions of dollars still unallocated for vaccines, for testing, for schools—all kinds of different things that we allocated in December—and it is already like: That is not enough. We need more.

Literally, the CDC and the NIH have billions of dollars unallocated right now from previous bills that have already been sent. And when my team contacted the White House team and said, "Hey, we see this big proposal; can you tell me what these dollars are allocated for?" their response was: It is an emergency. We need a big package.

They literally couldn't tell us what the money would be spent for.

Now, I have to tell you, this is not just a partisan issue for me. I asked the

exact same thing of the Trump administration. When they made a big proposal, I went back to them with the exact same question: What is this money to be used for? They couldn't answer it. So I continued to press for months until we got an answer, until we got a right amount. That seems like a reasonable thing for us to do, regardless of who is in the White House, to say: This is the American people's money. And, in this case, none of it is actually money that is allocated. All of it is borrowed.

So before we spend a dime of money that we borrow from China, we should probably know what it is actually for. In the \$1.9 trillion package proposal, there is even a section in it that is a \$50 billion fund to spend for needs, however the administration wanted to fill that blank in—\$50 billion. No, thank you. We have a basic responsibility to be able to ask questions on this.

If the reports are accurate, when 10 Republican Senators sat down with the White House to talk about a different proposal to be more targeted toward the actual needs right now, if the reports are correct—I wasn't there at the time, but if the reports are correct—every time a proposal came up, some of the President's team sitting against the wall facing the President would shake their head to signal the answer to President Biden: Say no to that one as well.

We have to find a way to be able to actually work things out. Why is this so difficult when we did it five times with a divided government last year? And now the focus is that we can no longer talk to Republicans. Where did the unity go?

Some of these Executive orders require a lot more attention and a lot more conversation instead of just imposing things on the American people because that makes a difficult situation worse.

On his first day in office, President Biden dismantled the title IX protections for women and imposed new gender identity requirements. Now, I agree with President Biden, every person should be treated with dignity and respect. But I also believe that extending respect and dignity means being honest about scientific and biological realities of sex and the differences between men and women.

All people—all people—should be afforded equal opportunity, but that also includes women and girls. Title IX was put into place to make sure that we had equal opportunity for women and girls in all areas. And under the guise of “preventing discrimination,” suddenly now women and girls are being discriminated against.

President Biden's Executive order to “prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity” is now a mandate to force school districts to allow biological boys to compete against biological girls in high school sports. You might think: What is the big deal about that? Well,

in Connecticut, two high school athletes who were born male, but now identify as female, won 15 women's championship titles that were once held by girls—in fact, 9 different girls. Those titles are gone from those girls. Female athletes are losing medals, podium spots, and chances for scholarships, or chances to play on a team with their peers.

Every person should be respected in our Nation, but there is a reason that title IX was created. This should demand more conversation in this body, not trying to impose it in an Executive order. Americans are not united in this issue. We are united that people should be respected and have every opportunity, but don't run over one group to be able to provide special status to another group.

I was disappointed, but not surprised, when there was an Executive order that was released on the issue of abortion—in fact, multiple Executive orders—on the week of the 48th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*.

For unity, President Biden gave the ironically titled “Memorandum on Protecting Women's Health At Home and Abroad”—once again, message. It is a good message, but it falls short of a standard about unity.

According to the most recent Marist poll, 77 percent of Americans oppose using taxpayer dollars to support abortion in other countries. Yet under the guise of unity, we are now spending money overseas on promoting and providing abortion. At a time when we have record debts and deficits, the Biden administration made one of its first priorities in the very first week to take some of the dollars that we do have and spend it to promote and provide abortion overseas in other countries. That is our foreign aid now.

As if funding abortion providers at home and abroad wasn't enough, the memo also directs the United States to withdraw from the historic Geneva Consensus Declarations. Thirty-five nations have agreed to four basic pillars. These are the four pillars that we just withdrew from: pillar No. 1, better health for women; pillar No. 2, the preservation of human life; pillar No. 3, strengthening of family as the foundational unit of society; and, pillar No. 4, protecting every nation's national sovereignty in global politics. That was so controversial that the Biden administration withdrew from that with 35 other countries.

Ironically enough, while President Biden pulled out of that treaty protecting women's health, he actually installed us deeper into a treaty with Russia. In his first week in office, President Biden agreed to a straight extension for 5 years of the outdated New START Treaty with Russia. The treaty was supposed to manage the proliferation of nuclear weapons between the United States and Russia, the two big superpowers, but it was written so long ago and is so out of date that it completely leaves out other superpowers, like China.

So while Russia has to mind an agreement, China continues to accelerate. The current status is that China will double its nuclear stockpile in the next decade, but they are not even in this treaty.

In addition to that, multiple areas are not even addressed in this New Start Treaty. That is why there was such a push in the previous administration to renegotiate it, because the New Start Treaty doesn't even include Russian weapons like “air-delivered ballistic missiles, nuclear powered underwater drones, hypersonic glide vehicles,” and “Nonstrategic nuclear weapons.” They were not even included. So even under this agreement, Russia can accelerate in those areas and say they are still meeting the agreement. And President Biden just extended it for 5 more years and said: We are not going to negotiate it for 5 more years. Let's just keep going.

The shift has moved from stopping nuclear proliferation to dealing with climate change. Why can't we do both? Why can't we pay attention to the environmental issues of our globe but also pay attention to the issue of nuclear proliferation? It is not like this is going away. It hasn't.

President Biden also took several issues on immigration, specifically border security. Right after the inauguration, speaking on unity, he puts out an Executive order with bizarre doublespeak in it that stated this: “The United States is a country with borders and with laws that must be enforced.” But the order itself after that literally put a 100-day moratorium on all deportations. It is like: We need to enforce our laws. And then the first step of it was that for 100 days we are not going to actually enforce our laws.

Now, this is not just some crazy piece here. The 100-day moratorium for deportations included individuals who are listed as criminal aliens. It also included people who had what is called a final order of removal from a court. That means that they have gone through every appeal in our court system here and a court has said: No, you do not qualify to be here legally. They have ordered them removed from the country. President Biden said no, we actually want them to be able to stay, even after a court order.

There is this great myth that ICE is roaming through cities in America just rounding people up. The fact is, in 92 percent of ICE enforcement and removal operations, those individuals have a criminal conviction or a pending criminal charge—92 percent. But President Biden immediately put a 100-day moratorium on it and said: Those individuals don't need to be deported. We will think about it for 100 days.

Now, thankfully, a Federal court has already stepped in and stopped that. Their statement was that this moratorium has—this is the quote from the Federal court—“no reasonable justification.” I agree. That is not enforcing our laws. That is not engaging in bipartisan unity.

The vast majority of Americans want legal immigration. The vast majority of Americans also believe that if someone has committed a crime in our country and they are not legally in our country, they should be deported. But the message that is being sent out is that those individuals won't.

As odd as it may seem, on January 26, President Biden instituted a travel ban from Brazil, the United Kingdom, Ireland, most of the EU, from South Africa, and said: Those folks can't come because of COVID threat. But at the same time he said he wants to evaluate title 42, which may allow people to come into the United States from Mexico, and do catch-and-release again here in the United States. So at the same time saying that business travelers from all over the world really don't need to come because of COVID threat, they are also looking at our southern border and saying: Yeah, but people coming from South America, Central America, they may be OK to come into the country and then be released while there is still a hearing pending.

May I remind this body, in the past year we have lost 21 people from the Department of Homeland Security along our southern border. Twenty-one agents and officers have died from COVID exposure while interacting with people coming from South America and Central America.

Why in the world do you close down the borders to business travelers and then start talking about opening them up to people not legally crossing the border? This is not the America we are looking for.

I had a lot of people in my State who were shocked, in the first days of the Biden administration, when he stopped the Keystone Pipeline and then he stopped all energy exploration on Federal lands. Those are jobs in my State. As President Biden likes to talk about, those are union jobs that are all over the country.

Thousands of people lost their jobs on day one of the Biden administration with a unilateral declaration: We are not going to do energy exploration, and we are not going to complete this pipeline.

What does that mean? That means to the Federal taxpayer, royalties are down because they are not gaining royalties off of the use of that land, so the taxpayer loses. That means jobs are down all over the country, especially in the west. And that means prices will go up for the consumer.

We are not running all on electricity right now. We are still running on oil and gas for the vast majority of our vehicles. And while I am all for multiple, different types of energy, that is not what is happening right now.

We should address this. We should work for unity. But right now, we are not even having dialogue. We are not even included in the conversation. If we are going to have unity, we have to talk about the hard issues and actually

come to a decision on how we are going to resolve those.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, first I would like to associate myself with the remarks of the distinguished Senator from Oklahoma, who has such a good insight into the impact of the Executive orders of the Biden administration on his State, very similar to my State. The concerns that he heard at home over the last 2 weeks are identical to the ones that I have heard in Wyoming the last 2 weekends.

It is day 15 today of the Biden administration, and on day 1, President Biden—and we listened as he spoke—promised to usher in a new era of bipartisanship, he said, and healing. Well, within his inaugural address, he said the words: “With unity, we can do great things.”

The Senator from Oklahoma and I agreed with the President and the words that he spoke on inaugural day, but here we are just 2 weeks later, and it seems to me it was all just talk. So far, we haven't seen much bipartisanship from the Biden administration. President Biden has already issued more than 45 Executive actions, and that is more Executive actions in the first 2 weeks than Presidents Trump, Obama, Bush, and Clinton in their beginnings in office.

It is interesting because, as President Biden was rolling out one Executive order after another, even the liberal New York Times, which endorsed President Biden, had this lead headline. And this was Thursday, January 28, so this was a full week ago. It says: Ease up on Executive orders. The New York Times to President Biden: Ease up on Executive orders. When the New York Times has to call President Biden out on Executive overreach, you know that President Biden has abandoned the promises that he made during the campaign and that he made to us on inaugural day.

To just kind of go into the editorial and what they wrote, they said: “Ease Up on the Executive actions, Joe.” They said: “[T]his is no way to make law.” They said: “These directives . . . are a flawed substitute for legislation.”

That is what we see the Biden administration adopting, a flawed substitute, as they say, for legislation.

They go on to say that on the campaign trail, President Biden touted his skills at making compromise. I saw that when I served with him in the Senate—before the Presiding Officer got here, but he and I served together in this body. I was on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which he chaired. He does have a history and a skill at finding compromise.

The New York Times went on to say that President “Biden's legacy will depend on his ability to hammer out agreements with Congress.” That is why we have three branches of government—the executive branch, the legis-

lative branch, and the judiciary branch; all of the branches of government—and, as they say, the legacy will depend on his ability to hammer out agreements with Congress.

The problem isn't just how many Executive orders are being issued, as my friend and colleague from Oklahoma said; it is what is in them.

President Biden has already launched a full-scale attack on American energy. To me, this is the whole Green New Deal dressed up as Executive orders. In fact, a Congresswoman from Michigan who is part of the squad has been actually boasting about it. She said the principles and the values in the Green New Deal are in the Executive orders by President Biden. She went on to say that the Green New Deal pushed the President toward a much more aggressive approach.

I think her statement is accurate. President Biden has already shut down the Keystone Pipeline. He drew a big target on the back of American energy, and then he pulled the trigger, killed the Keystone Pipeline. Hundreds of American workers have already received pink slips. Thousands more will do so. And that will be soon. President Biden banned new oil and gas leases on Federal lands. Half of my State is Federal land, so we know how this works. If this President also keeps his promise to ban fracking, this could lead to a total of millions of Americans losing jobs over the next couple of years.

At a time when 10 million Americans are already unemployed, these figures are shocking. Yet Democrats aren't stopping there. Last week, the Democratic leader came to the floor, and he urged President Biden to go even further, to do even more—much more than was criticized by the New York Times. He said President Biden should declare a national emergency because of climate change—a national emergency, he said, the leader of the Democratic Party, on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Leader SCHUMER is admitting that this radical environmental agenda doesn't have bipartisan support. It doesn't seem to even have Presidential support to that level, but that is what Senator SCHUMER is calling for.

Apparently, Senator SCHUMER isn't just wanting to outsource energy jobs; he seems to want to outsource the work of the U.S. Senate as well. That is not what the American people sent us here to do. They didn't send us here to stand by and watch a President go with one Executive order after another, after another; they sent us here to get things done.

The truth is, despite what Leader SCHUMER says, there is actually bipartisan support for action on climate change. Just over a month ago, the Senate passed a bill called the USE IT Act, which I authored with Senator CARPER. It came through the Environment and Public Works Committee, which I chaired. It was completely bipartisan. It came through the committee unanimously. It doesn't cost a

single American a job. It makes a difference with regard to climate. That is what the American people sent us here to do, to work together to find solutions that work, that don't hurt. Unfortunately, it is not the Biden approach. The Biden approach turns out to be more mandates, less energy production, and fewer American jobs.

Now we see President Biden pushing a \$2 trillion spending bill. He says it is to help fight coronavirus. We just passed a \$900 billion coronavirus relief bill about a month ago, signed into law, and as a result, our economy is actually doing better than expected.

Now President Biden, with his new bill, wants to send checks to families making in excess of \$250,000 a year—a government check, paid for by taxpayers, added to the national debt. Families making over a quarter of a million dollars a year getting a check from the government when they have never missed a paycheck in the first place?

He also wants to give added bonuses for people who are out of work on unemployment. People who are out of work on unemployment need that unemployment but not with the added bonuses to the level that President Biden is pointing to. And I hear about it in Wyoming. I heard about it last week.

If we pass what President Biden is calling for, the average unemployed American would receive a little less than \$800 a week total from the government, by their regular unemployment and by the enhanced unemployment. That is equivalent to a job making \$40,000 a year. People would, in many places, be paid more to not go back to work than they could earn if they went back to work. So the incentive is to keep them out of work. At the same time, we have "Help Wanted" signs up around the State of Wyoming.

President Biden's proposal also includes billions of dollars in spending unrelated to coronavirus—completely unrelated—which is something the American people don't understand. They understand we need to fight coronavirus. They understand we need to get people back to work. They understand we need to get kids back to school. But to add extraneous spending unrelated to coronavirus is something Americans don't understand.

Now, this bill includes a mandate from Washington, DC, a mandate to the small businesses all around the country—many of them struggling, many of them having a hard time making their payroll—and the Washington mandate is, you will double the amount of money that you pay right now if you are paying the current minimum wage—doubling the national minimum wage; a mandate from Washington on small business; nothing to do with coronavirus but a lot to do with making it that much harder for the small businesses in the small towns of Wyoming to make their payroll and to stay open.

Now, it makes common sense when you take a look at that impact—and

even the Congressional Budget Office has looked at it, and they have come to the same conclusion that I have and that the people of Wyoming have: It is going to cost jobs. The Congressional Budget Office says it will cost 1,300,000 jobs across America if President Biden has his way and forces a double of the minimum wage on small businesses of America.

Now, in exchange for that Federal mandate, the bill pays off States, big cities, blue States with a long history of bad behavior, to the tune of \$350 billion. A study from JPMorgan just came out, and the study shows that State tax revenues barely dropped at all in 2020 as a result of the coronavirus. They dropped less than 1 percent. These States do not need \$350 billion of additional Federal support. If the State needs a bailout, it is not because of coronavirus; it is because of a long history of mismanagement.

The Biden administration made this proposal without any meaningful discussions with Republicans at all. And the administration is even ignoring the Democrats. Vice President Harris recently went on television in West Virginia and in Arizona. Why? Not to put pressure on Republicans; to put pressure on Democrats—big story in the New York Times today—putting pressure on the two new Senators, Senator SINEMA and—the Senators from Arizona—Senator KELLY, the newest elected Senator from Arizona, put on them to vote for the bill. She also went to West Virginia—Senator MANCHIN. Not only are they not talking to Republicans; now they are trying to pressure Democrats.

Let's face it. The Democrats are trying to cram this bill through Congress. That is what they are going to do with the vote-arama this week.

On Friday there was an article in the Washington Post. The headline is this: "Biden, Democrats prepare to move beyond efforts to woo Republicans." I have to ask, what efforts? Haven't reached out in any serious way. As some of my colleagues have said, we have proven we can work together with coronavirus relief. We did it five times in the last year. We passed five different coronavirus relief bills, and the total relief was \$4 trillion.

The article in the Post goes on and quotes Leader SCHUMER. He says that we must not repeat the mistakes of 2008 and 2009. He is referring to the fiscal crisis back then. Well, that response was then led by Vice President Joe Biden. Yes, there were plenty of mistakes. Leader SCHUMER seems to think that the mistake was that it was too bipartisan, and that is the wrong lesson. The mistake Congress made under Vice President Biden in 2009 was to spend huge sums of money, completely unrelated to solving the underlying problem. Yet that is what the Democrats seem to want to do once again. The last time the Democrats did that, we had the slowest recovery since the Great Depression. Do you know

what got us out of that slow recovery? American energy, which President Biden is now trying to kill. There are a lot of lessons to be learned here.

So, on Monday, 10 Republican Senators went to the White House and made their own proposal on coronavirus relief. I really do hope the President listened because 2 weeks into this administration, the President's inaugural address is not something that is going to be remembered like John Kennedy's inaugural address was in 1960. This inaugural address is going to be remembered for empty rhetoric. President Biden has been trying to govern using a pen and a phone. Remember that from the Obama administration? I would say to President Biden: Time to just put down the pen and pick up the phone.

A Democratic politician famously said that politicians campaign in poetry and govern in prose. President Biden campaigned in moderation, but that is not the way he is governing. He is governing in partisanship. It is not what the American people are asking for. It is not what they voted for.

We have a 50-50 Senate. Democrats have a very narrow majority in the House. I would urge the administration to change course. This—if there is a mandate—is a mandate to move to the middle. I urge my Democratic colleagues to work with us on real coronavirus relief, on producing more American energy, and on creating more jobs across our country. Let us come together and get things done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The junior Senator from Texas.

REMEMBERING JERRY ELLIG

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I rise today to honor the life of a dear friend and a former colleague of mine, Jerry Ellig.

Some 2 weeks ago, at just 58 years old, Jerry passed away. Jerry and I met in June of 2001. We were both working in the George W. Bush administration. We were working together at the Federal Trade Commission. I had just been hired, at all of 30 years old, to run the Policy Planning Office, and Jerry was my Deputy.

I hadn't met Jerry. Our boss Tim Muris, the Chairman, had brought Jerry in beforehand. It is always a dangerous thing when somebody else hires your Deputy, but in this case, Tim did me an enormous favor. Jerry was a colleague of Tim's from George Mason University, a Ph.D. economist, a brilliant man, a lover of liberty. And Jerry and I, for the next 2 years, ran the Policy Planning Office together, and we became dear friends.

I don't know that I ever saw Jerry without a smile, without a twinkle in his eye. He always had a joyful spirit, a mischievous grin. And he believed in the power of truth. He became an economist because, I think, Jerry was born to be an economist. I have no doubt playing with his LEGOs as a child, he

thought about supply and demand and price elasticity. And he believed in the power of free markets.

One of the things that the Policy Planning Office did was something called competition advocacy. Now, the FTC statutory mandate is to defend the competition. There are some 75 Ph.D. economists on the full-time staff at the FTC. And Jerry and I, together, when various State legislatures or State regulatory bodies across the country were considering a particular bill that would have potentially anti-competitive effects—if those State legislatures or regulators asked for our input, the FTC would analyze the proposed bill, and we would file testimony, written testimony, oral testimony. Both Jerry and I testified multiple places. In fact, I went to my office and pulled out the binder of all the competition advocacy that we filed in our time together at the FTC on topic after topic after topic.

You know, there are a lot of bad ideas that government considers, bad ideas that come from special pleaders—someone who will benefit—but the harm to consumers is usually diffuse, harder to see, and much greater.

And what the FTC would do in competition advocacy is simply quantify the harm, simply provide truth and light and sunshine. It was incredible that when we would be asked to come in and present that testimony over and over and over again, the decision makers would choose not to adopt bad policies, simply when they understood, through careful empirical analysis, how that would hurt the consumers.

One area, in particular, that Jerry and I worked on quite a bit was e-commerce. We started an e-commerce task force. This was 20 years ago. E-commerce was in a much more nascent stage 20 years ago than it is today. We examined 10 different industries, every one of which there were barriers to entry. The existing bricks and mortar suppliers would go to their State regulators and seek to erect barriers to entry to stop new e-commerce entrants from competing and driving down prices.

Actually, much of the impetus for the entire e-commerce task force came from a white paper that the Presiding Officer will be interested to know where this white paper came from. It was the Democratic Leadership Council, a centrist Democrat group that had written a white paper entitled “Revenge of the Dissenter Mediated.” And it talked about all these industries where e-commerce was benefiting consumers but entrenched interests were fighting against it.

Jerry and I, together at the FTC, we convened 3 days of public hearings of 10 different industries—contact lenses, telemedicine, education, funerals and caskets, wine.

It was interesting. At the end of the hearings, we prepared a series of reports. Every single industry panel—all 10 of the ones who testified—at least 1

of the witnesses said some variance of the following: You know, I have looked at the anti-competitive restraints in these other nine industries, and those are terrible. Those are clearly hurting consumers, but our industry is different.

One of the industries we looked at that Jerry took a particular passion for was wine. There were, at the time, extensive restrictions on direct shipment of wine—shipment across State lines, shipment to your home. It was heavily, heavily regulated, and the wholesalers did not want to see that change. We began studying and working on what would become a wine report. It is over 100 pages long of empirical study on what that was doing. We concluded that for consumers, it was driving up costs dramatically, not just a little bit but dramatically.

I will tell you, Jerry took great joy in traveling through Northern Virginia, going to wineries, sampling the wine—I will say, he enjoyed that process of it as well—but collecting empirical price data.

At the time, numerous arguments were raised as to why you should not allow the direct shipping of wine. One was that it would lead to minors drinking too much. I have to admit, Jerry and I laughed about that because I don't know that I have ever known a 15-year-old who wanted a nice, perky chardonnay. If you were dealing with home keg deliveries, that I will concede would raise an issue, but wine connoisseurs does not match any teenagers I have known.

But we decided, well, rather than argue about it theoretically, let's find out. So we sent a letter to the alcohol control boards in each of the States that allowed direct shipment. We asked them a very simple question: Have you seen any problem? Have you encountered any problems with underage drinking as a result of this policy? And lo and behold, they all wrote back and said: No, we haven't seen it at all. It hasn't produced any of that. All that came together in a report detailing the harm to consumers that came from these restrictions.

I will tell you, just a couple of years later, the U.S. Supreme Court took up a case challenging those restrictions on the interstate sale of wine, striking them down, so that now you or I, if we want to order a bottle of wine for our home, we can go and do it on our phone and get it delivered at our home. The Supreme Court decision striking that down cited that wine report that Jerry and I had done more than a dozen times. As I said, Jerry believed in the power of truth, the power of facts, simply shining a light: This is hurting people.

Jerry also took joy in that project. You know, Jerry was a fan of tiki cocktails and mixology and all of tiki culture, for that matter. He would proudly wear Hawaiian shirts—loud Hawaiian shirts that his daughter Kat had picked out for him. And he would wear them

with the smile and joy he brought every day.

He also made some of his own wine. For several years, Heidi and I enjoyed a bottle of cherry port that Jerry had made. He wasn't at risk of suddenly going into the winery business, but it was still, nonetheless, an enjoyable bottle of cherry port.

Another project Jerry undertook at the FTC was examining education and school choice. I sat down with Jerry and another Ph.D. economist at the FTC, and we talked about school choice. And I asked the two of them, Jerry and Ken, I said: Let's examine the arguments that are raised against school choice. The most significant argument raised against school choice is that school choice will destroy the public schools; that it will harm the public schools if you give low-income kids access to scholarships. We sat down and said: All right, let's treat that argument seriously. Let's not dismiss that out of hand. Let's treat it seriously because if it were true, I would oppose school choice. That is a serious reason to oppose it. Let's find out if it is true.

Jerry and Ken, as economists are want to do, they framed the problem more broadly. They said: What is the impact in a regulated monopoly or oligopoly when competition is introduced and, in particular, what is the impact on quality for the customers who remain with the incumbent providers, not the folks who go to the new entrants but the customers that just remain with the incumbent provider? They went through and they examined multiple other industries that had been regulated monopolies or oligopolies and for which there were abundant data.

They looked at telecom; they looked at airlines; they looked at surface freight transportation. And as they detailed in each instance, when competition came in, quality went up. Competition was good. They then examined every empirical study that had been done to date of school choice programs that had been implemented across the country. They found that, unsurprisingly, again, that competition was good—something we have seen in the two decades since; that when kids get options and competition is brought in and scholarships are available, that the quality of education in struggling public schools gets better and better and better. That article was published: “Competition and quality in deregulated industries: Lessons for the education debate.” It is another example of how Jerry recognized that facts, that reason can be powerful.

When I left the FTC, Jerry went on to take over the Office of Policy Planning. He led that office of lawyers and economists who loved Jerry, loved his principles, loved his drive, loved his warmth, loved his humor. He was a professor for decades, beloved by his students.

He spent decades at Mercatus studying regulations, studying the impact of

overregulation, analyzing it. He just finished his tenure as the Chief Economist at the Federal Communications Commission. He was a brilliant guy.

When he passed 2 weeks ago—an untimely death—talented economists from governments and the academy mourned Jerry, writing touching words. And in Discourse Magazine, published by the Mercatus Center, Ajit Pai, Chairman of the FTC, for whom Jerry worked as Chief Economist, wrote that he would always remember Jerry's warm smile.

Jerry would always start off the conversation with a warm smile, which would put everyone at ease. He would then explain in a collegial tone how he thought we should proceed—wisdom that always informed our ultimate decisions. Smiling and speaking gently are small things, perhaps; but at a time when the currency of public policy discourse is too often pounding the table, Jerry's approach was memorable.

He loved his work. He loved economics. He loved free markets. And he loved his family. Jerry was blessed with an incredible wife Sandy, who is a dear friend as well; their daughter Kat, whom they adore—an incredible loving, fun family. You know, when they were on road trips, Jerry would eat grilled cheese sandwiches made by his daughter in a toaster oven in the car because he loved Kat so much.

Jerry, like myself, is also a big fan of the movie "The Princess Bride." Jerry's death so early is inconceivable.

God bless the memory of Dr. Jerry Ellig. God bless the Ellig family.

In Heaven, the lion lies down with the lamb and, Jerry, may there be no transaction costs and may the Coase theorem fully operate.

We love you, and we miss you, Jerry. God bless you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, we are 1 year into the worst pandemic in a century, and it is clear that Native Americans have felt some of the most severe impacts of COVID.

Here is what we know: The number of confirmed cases per capita among Native Americans is 3½ times that of White Americans; they are almost twice as likely to die from COVID than White Americans when they contract it; and over a third of all Native Americans are at high risk of serious COVID-19-related complications—the highest percentage of any group in the United States. Native Americans need help now, and it is our job to deliver.

President Biden has proposed a bold plan, one that meets the moment and one that helps our most vulnerable communities. The President's plan includes more than \$28 billion for Native people, making it the largest investment in Indian Country in American history. From Hawaiian homelands to villages, pueblos, rancherias, and other Native communities, our fellow Americans who live on or near these lands

need immediate relief, not half measures, not delays.

As the new chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, I urge my colleagues to join me in voting for this resolution and delivering critical relief to all Native Americans—Native Hawaiians, Alaska Natives, and American Indians.

First, to help slow the spread in Native communities, we have to invest in healthcare, and that is why this resolution includes millions of dollars in critical resources to support the Native Hawaiian Healthcare Systems and more than \$6 billion for the Indian Health Service, which is the primary vaccine distributor for more than 330 Tribes and urban Indian organizations across the country.

These funds are going to help enhance healthcare services, particularly by improving the IHS's telehealth infrastructure. The IHS and Tribal healthcare facilities are overwhelmingly located in rural and isolated settings, with little access to specialty services, like cardiology. So expanding telehealth so that more people can get the specialty care they need wherever they are is a game changer for Native communities. Finally, these healthcare funds will support the medical workers who are on the frontlines every day, caring for Native families and fighting the virus.

We also need to shore up Tribal governments and Federal programs and services that Native people rely on with an infusion of resources. That kind of historic, critical investment is exactly what President Biden proposes to do. Because Tribes are uniquely dependent on their business enterprises to fund essential government services for their citizens, this budget resolution calls for \$20 billion to support Tribal governments. To put a fine point on it, the gaming operations are mostly closed, and that is how they fund health and education in many instances. These funds will enable Tribes to continue to provide services like elder care and the deliveries of medicine and food that are particularly critical during the pandemic, and it will help us to keep the lights on at their businesses.

There is also \$750 million to address overcrowding in homes and homelessness—circumstances that disproportionately affect Native Americans because housing stock tends to be scarce, and this problem compounds with people living in tight quarters and being unable to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Ensuring Native Americans have access to safe and affordable housing is essential to stopping the spread of COVID and crushing this pandemic.

The plan also includes \$900 million for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to support critical programs that keep people safe, protect kids, and help to deliver water to Native families. Now, especially during this pandemic, the BIA should step up, own its fiduciary responsibility, and help the Tribes fight

the negative impacts of COVID in their communities.

There is also \$850 million for the Bureau of Indian Education's schools, colleges, and universities to address critical education infrastructure and to enhance distance learning capabilities and, hopefully, bring kids back into the physical classroom. Yet you can't do that without money. You can't do that without crushing the pandemic. You can't do that without safety. We must make sure that Native students don't get left behind and that we protect the health and safety of students and teachers.

We all need to work together and support Native families and communities across the Nation. I think about the history of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, and I think of my two predecessors, Senator Daniel K. Inouye and Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka, and the legacies that they built of bipartisanship.

I understand we are about to have a fight this week around a very silly process called vote-arama, but we need to remember what this is all about. This is not about a goofy 10-hour or 12-hour or 15-hour process where we stack amendments and try to set each other up that will somehow trick someone into taking a bad position that can be turned into a campaign advertisement. That is tomorrow, and it is nonsense, and everybody should ignore it if they can. Do anything to not watch vote-arama. It is boring, and it is the worst part of the U.S. Senate, but it is a very important means to an end.

It is a very important means to an end because we were elected to deliver COVID relief. Once we get through this goofy process tomorrow night—or maybe it is Friday morning or whenever it is—we are going to be in a position to deliver COVID relief. Then we are going to be in a position to talk to our Republican colleagues on and off the committee representing Indian Country, representing Alaska Native communities, and representing Native Hawaiian communities and figure out how to make sure that the people who are suffering the worst during this pandemic get the help they need and deserve, and that is something we can come back together on as we move forward on this legislation.

With that, I yield to the senior Senator from Nevada, a member of the Indian Affairs Committee, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Madam President, I rise to join my good colleague, the chair of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, the Senator from Hawaii, and I couldn't agree more with him in my support of the budget resolution that is coming before the committee in the Senate this week.

In Nevada and across the country, our Tribes are hurting. They are trying to do too much with far, far too little. Some of them are still under lockdown,

desperate to protect elders—often the gatekeepers of rich Native languages and cultures—from the impact of the virus that they see is devastating their communities, and many are struggling to keep business doors open. All of them are stretched too thin. Sadly, this isn't new. Tribes were suffering from unstable funding streams and budget shortfalls even before the coronavirus pandemic affected their economies. Now on shoestring budgets—with staffing levels that were insufficient even before the pandemic hit—they are trying to address the myriad urgent needs of their communities.

That means administering COVID-19 testing and getting vaccines into arms, all while providing a whole range of other critical healthcare services like behavioral healthcare and primary care. It also means administering affordable housing programs, supporting Tribal businesses, and ensuring the safety of the students and teachers in Native communities. The needs are immense.

Coronavirus relief for Nevada and the Nation's Tribes has to address the disparities that have made Natives up to 3.5 times more likely to contract COVID-19, and it has to make sure Tribes can build back economically after the pandemic ends. To do this, we have to start by replenishing the Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Education Stabilization Fund, and the Homeowner Assistance Fund, all of which have been providing valuable lifelines to Native communities impacted by COVID-19.

The Federal Government absolutely has to do more to support these efforts and uphold the Federal trust responsibility. It can help Tribes navigate the Federal bureaucracy and ensure that funds allocated to Tribal priorities actually get into the hands of those who need them.

Congress also needs to make sure that we are meeting our treaty obligations to provide healthcare for American Indians and Alaska Natives even when they live in urban areas rather than on Tribal lands. We can start by passing the Urban Indian Health Parity Act to shore up Medicaid funding for urban Indian healthcare facilities and put them on a level playing field with Indian Health Services run by the Federal Government or Tribes on reservations.

Looking forward, we also must do more to permanently and robustly fund the Indian Health Service. This pandemic has only shown the risks of underinvesting in public health in Native communities, and we have to make sure that the IHS is able to prepare for emergencies, like this one, far better in the future. Leaving American Indian and Alaska Native communities without sustainable funding streams for the health services that they were guaranteed by this government is a violation of our treaty obligations, plain and simple.

I support every resource we can get for Nevada's hard-hit Native communities and our communities across the country, and that is why I urge my colleagues to support this budget resolution that will help these hardest hit communities.

I yield the floor to my new colleague from the great State of New Mexico.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. LUJÁN. Madam President, I rise to speak on the resolution's investment of \$8.6 billion through the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

Our Native American brothers and sisters on Tribal lands are four times more likely to contract COVID-19 and twice as likely to die from it. The Navajo Nation has seen extended families ravaged by disease, families like the Muskets, who were careful to protect their elderly parents, Benjamin and Louise, from the virus. Despite taking the necessary precautions and having access to electricity and running water—something many of our Navajo brothers and sisters still lack—the whole family became ill. Because the overburdened IHS-run medical center closest to them was unable to treat Benjamin's advanced condition, he was flown to one of the nearest hospitals in Albuquerque that would have taken hours to have gotten there by car. He died far from his beloved Louise. Five days later, Louise also passed.

In New Mexico, community members and students are still mourning the loss of Laura Escalanti, a beloved Tewa teacher at Pojoaque Valley High School, from San Ildefonso Pueblo. "Ms. Laura," as she was known, imparted on her students pride in themselves through language. Her funeral procession from Ohkay Owingeh to San Ildefonso Pueblo brought mourners out from their homes to the roadways to bid farewell to their teacher of more than 20 years. Sadly, there are too many Native American families and communities mourning loved ones.

This resolution strikes at the heart of the health disparities and circumstances that make Tribal communities more vulnerable to COVID-19. It provides Tribal and public governments with critical funding to take action against the deadly virus and the havoc it has wreaked on their citizens, their economies, and the public health infrastructure. The budget resolution provides necessary investments to support Tribal governments that have struggled to maintain public and social safety network services.

It also provides the Indian Health Service, which is the primary vaccine provider for over 330 Tribal nations and urban Indian health organizations, with funding and resources to respond to this crisis.

Access to nearby hospitals and emergency services may be dozens, even hundreds of miles away in my State, and we must do everything in our power here in the Senate, here in the House, and in Washington, DC, to en-

sure that every hospital and clinic has the staff and supplies to get families the care they need.

Our response to COVID-19 must support and protect the most vulnerable among us. Today's resolution recognizes that, and I am proud to support it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, for more than a year, our country has been in the grip of an unprecedented health and economic catastrophe.

It was January, if we recall, of last year when the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was found in our country. Since then, more than 444,000 of our fellow citizens have died, more than 26 million have been infected, millions have lost their jobs, and every day there are another thousands more deaths.

A year ago, former President Trump boasted—just think of this. This is just a year ago. He said that there were only 15 COVID-19 cases in this country, and he said that soon the number would be zero.

For months, he told the American people there was nothing to worry about. Nothing to worry about? Tell the 26 million who have been infected, the nearly half a million who have died, because it is obvious to anyone paying attention to the country's public health experts that, unfortunately, he had no idea what he was talking about. But, of course, he wasn't interested in what anyone else had to say.

All of us can see so many unforgiveable mistakes, so many missed opportunities in dealing with this virus that we and the world are now facing a calamity unlike anything in modern history.

The last administration, rather than unite the country against the virus, chastised people for wearing masks. They vilified Governors who tried to stop the spread of the virus. Former President Trump said it would disappear "like magic."

Over the summer we lost even more time with the inexplicable decision to take a "pause" and delay further COVID relief. That was precious time that could have been spent trying to get the pandemic under control. Time was wasted while the virus spread and mutated, and now we are dealing with multiple variants, some of which are more easily transmissible and possibly more deadly.

The previous administration's handling of this disease was a monumental, unforgiveable failure of leadership. Tens of thousands of Americans would be alive today if the Trump administration had done their job or, at the very least, stopped making it impossible for the people who wanted to do their job. Historians are going to judge him harshly. That was then. Our job now is to rally behind a President who understands the seriousness and urgency of what we are facing.

The \$1.9 trillion package proposed by President Biden is the kind of bold, comprehensive proposal we have needed since last spring. I felt privileged to sit with him this morning, along with other Senators, and discuss it, because we know the President's plan would provide the resources to mount a national vaccination program, safely open our schools, restore American global leadership, and provide direct support to the people in need.

Now, everybody here wants to reopen our economy, but we can't do that if we don't defeat the virus. President Biden understands that. He also understands that as long as the virus is spreading anywhere, it threatens people everywhere. That is why we need a global response.

As incoming chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I am committed to supporting the President's proposal expeditiously. The American people have endured enough despair, sickness, and death due to the incompetence of the previous administration.

I also share President Biden's desire to make this a bipartisan process. He and I served together in this body, and I know he wants to do that. But the price of bipartisanship cannot be a package that falls far short of meeting the needs of the American people.

There were painful consequences for delaying another broad relief package between April and December of last year, even though many of us wanted to bring it to the floor of the Senate, and now there are reasons why States today don't have the quantity of vaccines they need, why our schools are being closed, why millions are out of work, and why the virus is spreading out of control. Valuable time was squandered. Countless people suffered and died as a result.

So I certainly cannot accept a piecemeal approach or months of further delay. The clock is ticking. In mid-March, key benefits that millions of Americans are relying on to survive will begin to lapse. We can't allow a self-inflicted wound to make their lives even worse.

Now, I am glad to see several of my friends from the other side of the aisle bring forth their own plan, but I am afraid the plan they have shown so far shortchanges America in critical ways. It provides little of the resources needed to reopen schools. It doesn't include money for State and local governments that are on the frontlines fighting this virus. And those State and local governments have been forced to lay off more than 1 million people since March. It cuts direct payments to struggling families from \$1,400 to \$1,000. If you are one of those struggling families, it not only hurts, it can be devastating.

And their proposal completely ignores what every single public health expert knows: If we don't help the lower income countries protect their people, we cannot defeat the virus. This is a global pandemic, and as long

as it is spreading in Central America and Africa and Asia, the virus and more deadly variants will find their way here. We learned that when we got together and fought Ebola when it was only an airplane flight away. Well, these strains are popping up all over the world. We have to work with other countries.

So I am hopeful there may be a bipartisan path forward, but I am not going to concede any tools at our disposal that can deliver the relief that the American people need—the relief long overdue.

I support the budget resolution that has been introduced. It put us on a path to passing a COVID relief package through the budget reconciliation process, and there is no reason a reconciliation bill can't be bipartisan. We have passed at least 17 bipartisan reconciliation bills since 1980 on behalf of the American people, and I welcome any Republican who would like to discuss where we could reach a compromise.

But let us not forget for a moment we are in the midst of a public health emergency, and right now the virus is winning. We are not winning; the virus is winning. So we can't waste months, like we did last year, negotiating a plan that fails to mount an effective response to the virus or to fully respond to the economic havoc it is causing.

We need quick action. We need a bold and comprehensive plan to fight the virus. We need to get people back to work so our economy can recover. That is what President Biden proposed.

You know, there is greater danger in doing too little than in doing too much. Secretary Yellen stated it so well when she recently stated, "The smartest thing we can do is act big."

It has been more than a year since this disease arrived in our country. It was never going to just "disappear." Viruses never do that. So there is no excuse for dragging our feet. Let's all support the bold package proposed by President Biden for the American people. I know I will.

I see the distinguished Senator from Ohio on the floor, so I yield to him.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, it is an honor to speak after Senator LEAHY, who has served his country and his State for over four decades.

This debate is really about one simple question: Are we going to do whatever it takes—whatever it takes—to get our country through a once-in-a-generation crisis?

We did that in March, a year ago. We haven't done it since. Now is our opportunity.

I joined some of my colleagues today at the White House to talk with President Biden about the urgency—the urgency—to get this done, to go big, and his plan that will finally start to make real progress against the pandemic and make a real difference in people's lives.

The American people made it clear in this election: They want a government

that is on their side. It is our chance to deliver for them.

We know we can. As I said, we did it last spring. We came together across the aisle. We passed the CARES Act. We expanded employment insurance, and we provided direct stimulus checks. We kept—and this is remarkable in the midst of a pandemic—13 million people in this country out of poverty. It gave tens of millions more peace of mind with a bit of a cushion to weather this crisis.

Think about that. Congress came together. Government did the right thing, and 13 million people were prevented from falling into poverty.

But then, as you know, what happened is, because we didn't act in May and June, in July and August, that help started to fall away, and thousands of people every single day in Milwaukee and in Cleveland and around this country, in Racine and in Dayton—thousands of people a day fell into poverty.

So my colleagues now say we have done enough. Well, tell that to the 92 percent of Americans who haven't gotten a vaccine yet. Tell that to the parents who wonder when it will finally be safe for their kids to go back to school. Tell that to the laid-off restaurant worker in Madison, wondering if she will be able to pay rent and pay the electric bill. Tell that to the busdriver in Columbus, wondering if she is going to lose her job.

We are the wealthiest country on Earth. Doing the bare minimum simply isn't good enough.

Slowly vaccinating people—when we know we are facing a new, more contagious virus variant—isn't good enough.

Letting our economic recovery limp along instead of roaring back isn't good enough.

Luckily, we have real leaders who aren't willing to settle for less. President Biden is already doing everything possible to ramp up vaccine production, to get new COVID tests on the market. He promised 1 million vaccines a day for the first hundred days of his Presidency. We are exceeding that number. It will help keep people in their homes. It will help keep workers from losing their jobs.

We need to give the President and our leaders in States all over the country every tool we can. Our plan puts money directly into people's pockets with the expanded stimulus checks, with tax cuts for workers and families, and through the expanded earned income tax credit and child tax credit.

As chair of the Banking and Housing Committee beginning tomorrow, I am committed to keeping a roof over people's heads, giving a lifeline to small businesses, keeping our buses and subways running, keeping workers on the job, and giving President Biden every tool possible through the Defense Production Act to get more vaccines to more people.

Our plan will help us dramatically expand American manufacturing. The

Presiding Officer has led the Senate on "Buy American." We will do more of that through the Defense Production Act. We will produce vaccines and PPE and more and better tests. We will help State and local communities and prevent layoffs and service cuts.

Essential workers—and a grocery store worker in Southwest Ohio told me several months ago: You know, they call me an essential worker, but I feel expendable because they don't pay me enough and they don't protect us on the job.

That has to change. Essential workers need help. They need buses and subways to get to work, to hospitals and grocery stores. We need those transit systems running and running safely. We need to keep busdrivers and construction workers on the job and on the job safely.

Our plan will give more support to small and minority-owned businesses. We know the biggest corporations have done better than ever during this pandemic. Amazon, Walmart, Comcast—all the big guys are doing just fine. They pretty much always do no matter what is happening with the rest of the country. They have paid their shareholders. They have done stock buybacks. But we have seen restaurants close in our neighborhood, some that have been operating for decades. We watched corner stores and drycleaners shut their doors. Small businesses are hurting. Our plan will not only keep PPP going, it will expand access to capital for the small entrepreneurs fighting for their dreams now.

Our plan will keep families from losing their homes. It will help them pay their bills and keep the heat on and the lights turned on. In December, 1 in 10 homeowners reported being behind on their mortgage. For Black, Latino, and Asian homeowners, that number is one in six. One out of every five renters in this country is behind in their rent. For Latino renters, it is one in four. For African-American renters, it is one in three.

Think about the daily stress that puts on people. They go to work every day. They are not paid enough. They are not sure they are safe at work. They come home, anxious about passing on this virus. They have to worry about paying their rent. They have to worry about food for their kids. They have to worry about whether the schools are open so kids can go there while they are trying to balance their workload. We have to do everything we can to alleviate that stress.

A moratorium on evictions and on foreclosures helps keep people safe in the short-run, but there is simply not enough for all the people who are behind with no way to catch up. Thankfully, we have had moratoriums on evictions. They haven't always worked. They work most of the time. But every month that moratorium stops you from being evicted is another month that you owe rent when the time comes. We know that.

Economists estimated that renters already owed \$57 billion in back rent by the end of January. That is twice the aid we provided for renters in December. So the package that most of us voted for helped a lot in December, but it is clearly not enough. That is why President Biden, the Senate, and the House have to go big. How could we let millions of families lose the homes they love or get trapped in a downward spiral of debt, all because of a virus far beyond any one person's control?

So I ask my colleagues of both parties—I just ask this: What do we do? Let's get this done. There is no time for quibbling over Senate procedure. Working families don't care about Senate rules. They care about when they get a vaccine. They care about when their kids get back to school. They care about keeping their jobs. They don't care how we get it done. They care about results.

The Senate has used these fast-track budget measures over and over in times far less dire than the ones we face now. Minority Leader MCCONNELL had no problem using these fast-track procedures that they now oppose to pour money into corporations' coffers with their tax cuts.

In fact, the last time—I was at the White House today with President Biden. The last time I was invited to the White House was President Trump inviting a group of us on the tax-writing committee to try to sell his big tax giveaway to corporate America and to the richest people in the country. We sat around the table in the President's Cabinet Room with two, I believe, of his billionaire Cabinet members who benefitted handsomely, as did his family, from this tax cut. It was a big, big giveaway to the largest corporations in this country and a big, big giveaway to billionaires and the richest people in the country but so little for the economy and so little for workers.

So Senator MCCONNELL, whose office, we know, is just down the hall—you often see lobbyists lining up. Back in the tax-cutting days, you saw lobbyists lined up out there outside his office waiting to get in to find out what tax break they could get. That was then. We used this fast-track procedure to get it done as if it were an emergency. Now it actually is an emergency. We just can't wait and negotiate and negotiate and negotiate and take forever to get this help.

You know, someone came to our Banking and Housing Committee and said: You know, before D-day, they didn't have a meeting at the White House and with the Congress saying: Can we afford this? Can we afford this war? Can we afford equipping our troops in Normandy?

Of course we could because we had to win the war. We are in a global crisis now. It is a war. We marshaled all of our vast resources and talents to rise to beat the global crisis in World War II. Then we grew the economy from the middle class out. We paid down the debt with rising wages.

Americans elected new leaders now—last November—because they were tired of a President and a majority leader who refused to treat this war against COVID with the same urgency. People are really sick and tired all over this country. They are sick and tired in Dayton and Akron and Canton and Mansfield of a President—of people or a President saying or then-Majority Leader MCCONNELL saying: We can't do it. We can't afford it. We have done enough.

Let's aim higher. Let's deliver for the people we serve. Let's raise the stimulus checks to \$2,000—money that will make a difference for so many families. Let's cut taxes for working families. Let's keep people in their homes. Let's keep small businesses open. Let's give every American a vaccine—a vaccine that will save their lives. That is the decision before this Senate.

Do we just say "We can't do very much. We ought to wait a while. Let's see if the last thing worked"? Let's come together. Let's pass this. Let's make a real difference in the American people's lives.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

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Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I rise today in support of the budget resolution and the American rescue plan proposed by President Biden. It is, without question, a necessary next step in our fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Just last month, roughly 100,000 Americans lost their lives to COVID. To date, we have lost more than 430,000 Americans to this virus. Included in this number is over 15,000 Michiganders. Millions of Americans have become sick as a result of this deadly virus, and far too many people in Michigan and across the country are suffering from the unprecedented economic crisis that this pandemic has caused. Families are struggling to put food on the table and to put a roof over their heads and just to pay bills.

The relief package that was passed in December provided important emergency relief, but it didn't go nearly far enough. I had the honor of meeting with President Biden and Vice President Harris today at the White House to discuss the need to work together and to act boldly and quickly to deliver urgently needed support.

More than 120 economists are pressing Congress to pass the sweeping relief package, and the danger is not going big but rather failing to meet the urgency of the moment. These 120 economists wrote: "History shows that what

our nation cannot afford is inaction or timidity in the face of what many consider to be the greatest economic disaster since the Great Depression.”

It is clear to me that we must extend unemployment benefits to those who are out of work through no fault of their own. We must pass an additional \$1,400 in stimulus payments to individuals. We must provide more food assistance to ensure that no child or family goes hungry because of this crisis, and we must ensure small businesses can stay afloat.

We must provide more funding to speed up the distribution of vaccines so that we can get more vaccines in the arms of Americans quickly, safely, and equitably. And we must provide more resources so that schools can reopen safely under the guidance of public health officials and experts.

We must deliver relief to communities on the frontlines of COVID-response efforts and make sure that they are not forced to cut essential services for residents or lay off health professionals or teachers or firefighters or law enforcement officials. We must replenish the disaster relief fund, which will help give our cash-strapped State and local governments the resources they need to pay for personal protection equipment, aid in vaccine distribution, and provide additional support services to communities struggling with overwhelming coronavirus cases.

We must provide funding to ensure there is strong oversight of how Federal taxpayer dollars are actually being spent on Federal COVID efforts, ensuring that resources and support that Congress has authorized is actually reaching the people who need it the most.

One of my top priorities and an issue I hear about every day from Michiganders is the need to extend unemployment benefits. Over 3 million Michiganders have claimed unemployment insurance since the start of this pandemic. That is around one-third of the entire population of Michigan. And, unfortunately, we are not out of the tunnel yet. Over half a million of these claims are still active.

It is not just impacting one part of my State. All 83 Michigan counties are experiencing higher levels of joblessness, a disturbing trend that we have seen continue into this year. Michiganders want to work, they want to keep their families safe, and they want to put food on the table. In order to do all of this, we must first get this pandemic under control, while helping families and workers make ends meet. They need and must have our continued help and our support.

As the Biden American Rescue Plan recognizes, Federal unemployment assistance programs are essential to bolstering our State programs, and while 1.9 million unemployment claims in Michigan during 2020 have flowed through the State unemployment program, nearly just as many claims, 1.7

million, were made possible by the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program. It is a program that I helped to establish last year in the CARES Act.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance is a lifeline to workers who are self-employed yet had their source of income interrupted by the pandemic, including gig workers and freelance workers and small business owners.

I certainly agree with President Biden that we must continue Federal unemployment assistance programs through September of 2021. Implementing this rescue package means we will not abandon millions of workers who otherwise would be ineligible for assistance or whose benefits would have long run out. It would also mean that the level of benefit that they receive is closer to the amount necessary for their families to have some measure of financial stability.

In Michigan, far too many families are finding it difficult to feed themselves and their children. Michigan had the sixth highest rate of projected food insecurity in 2020. Nearly 2 million individuals lived in food-insecure households. That means each day almost one in five Michiganders worries about whether or not they or their loved ones are going to get enough to eat that day.

The number of Michiganders struggling with hunger has increased by around 600,000 since the start of the pandemic, and, sadly, most of this has been as a result of an uptick in child hunger.

Our food banks across Michigan are doing all they can to step up to the challenge, but they are experiencing unprecedented surges in demand as more families seek assistance. Food assistance is one of the top reasons people contact my State's emergency hotline. The Federal Government must do more in providing food assistance to these families.

The American Rescue Plan will extend the 15-percent Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefit, while maintaining an increase through the coming months and through the summer, a time when childhood hunger is at its highest level due to the lack of school meals. It is a critical backstop against rising food insecurity, and this change will help keep hunger at bay for around 40 million Americans.

The rescue plan also supports these efforts by providing a one-time emergency infusion of support for State anti-hunger and nutrition programs. This will ensure that benefits quickly and efficiently get to children and to those families that are in need.

According to the nonprofit No Kid Hungry campaign, this funding will amount to around \$25 more per person per month for those who are currently struggling. A family of four will get an extra \$100 a month. This is an investment we must certainly make.

The proposal before us will also invest \$3 billion to help women, infants,

and children get the food they need. This multiyear investment in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, known as WIC, is needed to account for increased enrollment due to growing hunger and to increase outreach to ensure that low-income families have access to high-quality nutritious food and nutritional education.

During this dark, challenging winter, we must address the hunger crisis in Michigan and across the country.

Another issue that I hear about constantly from Michiganders is the additional support we must provide to our small businesses. Many small businesses—the very backbone of Michigan's economy and the economic driver in many of our local communities—have been forced to shutter or are just barely hanging on.

Nationally, small business revenue is down 32 percent, and at least 400,000 firms have permanently closed. Minority-owned small businesses and those in hard-hit industries, like restaurants and hotels and entertainment, have suffered disproportionately.

Whether it is a boutique in Plymouth, a family-owned farm in Michigan's fruit belt, or a restaurant in Detroit, these small businesses bring our State character, community, and a sense of place.

Congress must do everything we can to assist our small businesses, and we must ensure that COVID-19 small business relief assistance is clearly administered and is easy to access. That is why I fought for a vital increase in small business funding, like the Paycheck Protection Program, which was included in the CARES Act and subsequent legislation that I was proud to help pass.

In Michigan, over 128,000 Paycheck Protection Program loans were approved before the program first expired, totaling over \$16 billion in funding. And although the PPP brought hope to many during this crisis, it alone was simply not enough. We must continue to expand access to small business grants and loans for our Michigan businesses.

The American Rescue Plan is ambitious, but it is achievable and will help our small businesses survive and help rescue the American economy as we work to recover. It will support communities that are struggling in the wake of COVID-19 by providing support for the hardest hit small businesses, especially small businesses owned by entrepreneurs of color, and protecting jobs of the first responders and transit workers and other essential workers whom we depend on each and every day.

It will provide grants to more than 1 million of the hardest hit small businesses—flexible, equitably distributed grants that will help small businesses get back on their feet and put the current disaster behind them. Additionally, it will leverage government funds into additional small business lending and investment.

By investing in successful State, local, Tribal, and nonprofit small business financing programs, Congress will exponentially generate low-interest loans and venture capital to help our small businesses survive, to create and maintain jobs, and to continue to provide the essential goods and services that our communities depend on.

According to an independent analysis conducted by Moody's Analytics, the American Rescue Plan will help create 7.5 million jobs in 2021, double economic growth, and return the United States to full employment a full year faster. Small businesses in Michigan and across the country need this help, and they need it now.

Passing the American Rescue Plan will help us get through this economic crisis and come out stronger on the other side. And I know we all look forward to the day when we can visit our small businesses.

I know I am excited to see Michiganders going out to eat in Greektown before visiting Comerica Park. They will stroll through downtowns like Birmingham and Grand Rapids. They will drive up north and spend time in small businesses in Traverse City and Marquette, and just maybe swing by a local brewery, or enjoy boating on one of our beautiful Great Lakes. I will never stop fighting to make sure that when the day comes, Michigan's small businesses will be up and running.

But as we address the economic impact to this pandemic, we must also use this relief package to address the public health crisis.

Since the outset of the pandemic, FEMA has stepped up to assist in response to the COVID-19 crisis by coordinating medical supply acquisition and distribution and assisting State and local governments with funds for response activity, such as overtime pay for public health officials. And now FEMA is taking on an even larger role as we continue this critical phase of response, which is vaccine distribution.

When I spoke to the President and Vice President earlier today, I was pleased to hear their vision for using FEMA resources and expertise to provide essential staff, supplies, transportation, and other resources necessary to ensure that every vaccine dose is actually reaching the arm of an American.

These activities are all supported through FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund, and we must provide the funding needed to ensure that FEMA can have the maximum flexibility to help our State and local governments and resources needed to deploy COVID-19 vaccines to combat this pandemic.

There are so many faces that have been on the frontlines of responding to this unprecedented public health crisis: our healthcare workers, delivery workers, grocery store employees, and so many others who have sacrificed so that we can have the care, the goods, and the services that we need to get by.

Essential workers include our dedicated civil servants who work tirelessly to serve the American people in countless ways—from providing medical care to delivering our mail, to safeguarding our national security. We truly appreciate their continued service under incredibly challenging circumstances.

To help ensure the health and safety of Federal employees and their communities, we must provide funding to the Emergency Federal Employee Leave Fund. This fund offers emergency paid leave, which ensures workers can stay at home if they are feeling ill, and, by doing so, prevent community spread of COVID-19.

This provision will also provide much needed flexibility to our civil servants and their families as they juggle caregiving for children and other family members with their remote public service work.

Our Nation's postal workers, who work tirelessly to deliver prescription drugs, essential goods, and even our holiday gifts throughout the pandemic, are facing unique challenges. Federal employees who interact directly with the public, like our hard-working postal employees and letter carriers, need better access to workers' compensation benefits if they contract COVID-19 in the line of duty.

The effectiveness of our ongoing response to this pandemic depends on our career Federal workforce, and these two policies are an important step in ensuring the safety of civil servants, their families, and their communities.

Finally, we need robust oversight to make sure relief dollars are spent appropriately and are going to families, small businesses, hospitals, and the communities that need them most.

When this body considered the CARES Act, I worked across the aisle with Senator JOHNSON and the House to create two oversight mechanisms to provide transparency and accountability to the American people.

First, we created the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee, or PRAC. The PRAC is a new entity made up of new inspectors general—independent industry watchdogs—and charged with overseeing the entire Federal Government coronavirus response and all of the associated spending. We also charged the Government Accountability Office—Congress's watchdog—to conduct similarly wide-ranging oversight.

In just 10 months, these oversight bodies have published reports on issues ranging from vaccine development to the Paycheck Protection Program, and the PRAC has established a website where anyone can go and see exactly where their hard-earned tax dollars are going.

We must continue to support both the PRAC and the GAO so they can continue this critical work, keeping Congress and the American people informed, ensuring taxpayer dollars are used responsibly, and helping to re-

store public trust in our Federal Government during this coronavirus response.

So it is clear, we are facing a crisis unlike any other in our Nation's history. We must work together to pass robust and bold COVID relief package. Michiganders and the American people are counting on us to do the right thing, and it is now our time to deliver.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

S. CON. RES. 5

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, I will take this time, as the incoming chairman of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, to just go over with our colleagues the importance of this budget resolution as it relates to the small business community.

I think Members of this Chamber know that small businesses represent the growth engine of America. That is where job creation occurs at the greatest numbers. Almost half of the jobs in America are in small companies. Just as importantly, when we look for innovation, we see innovation in small businesses. They are the ones that figure out how to do things more efficiently and better, and that has also been true during COVID-19.

As we have seen small businesses around the Nation struggle, we have seen how creativity among small business has saved so many small businesses in America, where they figure out a better way to deal with the food service because they can't have in-restaurant service, in how they have dealt with the service industries generally, in how they have dealt with retail sales, safety with COVID-19 and delivery and internet. They have come up with better ways to do things, and that is why our economy is performing at the level it is—not the level we want it to be—because small businesses have figured out ways to do things better.

But there is another characteristic of small business I think we all understand. They don't have the same degree of resiliency. They don't have the deep pockets. They don't have the outside financiers. So they don't have the big reserves. So when we hit a bump in our economy, small businesses really suffer.

In every economic downturn, we know that small businesses are going to do worse than larger companies, and during this pandemic, it was particularly important for us to respond to help our small businesses so that when we get out of this pandemic, when our economy returns, the small business community is healthy and our economy can continue to grow.

This has been made even more challenging because we have imposed restrictions, as government, on the operations of small businesses during COVID-19. We have told restaurants they couldn't serve in-restaurant. We limited the number of people who can gather. All that has affected the economic strength of small businesses in America.

So Congress has responded. We have responded. We need to do more. Our first major response was in the CARES Act. Let me remind the Presiding Officer and the Senate and all that that bill was passed in mid-March. It was a bipartisan bill, and it was bold. It was a major effort to deal with the pandemic as we understood it in March of last year.

So we recognized that the first thing we had to do if we were going to help rebuild our economy, if we were going to help small businesses, the very first thing we had to do was get the virus under control. That is why the CARES Act in March had what we called the Marshall Plan for healthcare, to put money into the development of a vaccine, to put money into protective equipment, to put money into testing, to put money into public health—because we recognized that, yes, we have a responsibility as the Federal Government to control this pandemic, and by the way, it will also help our economic recovery because we knew that consumers could not go out until the virus—in right numbers—until the virus was under control.

But we also knew we had to do things for small businesses directly, and we acted in a bold manner. We passed the Paycheck Protection Program, the PPP program, a new program. We did this in a bipartisan manner. We did it to keep employees on the payroll.

We recognized at that time that, yes, you can lay off workers and they can collect unemployment, but wouldn't it be better if we could keep them on the payroll? And the Paycheck Protection Program was an immediate influx of help for small businesses to keep their payrolls strong—and it worked—by these forgivable loans that, when used for that purpose, the entire loan could be forgiven.

In mid-March when we passed this, we didn't know the demand. We didn't know how much would be needed, and we certainly thought that by sometime, we hoped, during the summer of last year, the pandemic would have been behind us. Well, we were wrong on both accounts. There wasn't enough money in the program, and we needed to recognize that more help was needed than what we just did in the CARES Act. So we replenished money, put more money into the PPP program. We made it more flexible for small businesses, recognizing that it was going to be a longer period of time during the pandemic.

If you look at the numbers on how the Paycheck Protection Program has been used, through January of this

year, 6 million loans—forgivable loans—6 million to the small business community, representing \$595 billion of Federal help. That is a significant amount of funds.

But we recognized last March and we have continued to realize that one size does not fit all for all small businesses, and where forgivable loans work for some small businesses, they don't work for others. That is why we enhanced the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, the EIDL Program. The EIDL Program consists primarily of disaster loans that are given out during natural disasters.

The very first bill we passed after COVID-19, for the pandemic, was to make those who were suffering as a result of COVID-19—those businesses—eligible for EIDL loans. Normally it is natural disasters, but we included this pandemic. Now, why is that important? Well, yes, forgivable loans equal to 2 months of your payroll, plus some additional expenses, help keep your payroll, but small businesses need additional capital beyond just covering their payroll and some rent expenses. So the EIDL Program provides much more flexible funds, a larger amount of money, so that small businesses can get through this economic downturn. It is low-interest, 30-year loans with very favorable repayment schedules.

The good news about what we did in March is that we made the Paycheck Protection Program and the EIDL Program—you could do both. So you could get the influx to help you with payroll, and you could get the longer term financing. And the numbers are impressive here. There were 3.7 million loans under the EIDL loan program; \$200 billion in loans was given out under EIDL. But let me point out—as I said, one size does not fit all. Loans work for some businesses but not all. So we wanted to do a grant program for those small businesses that are intimidated by taking out a loan because they said they can't even pay their existing loans; how could they take out more loans.

So we started a new program, an EIDL Advance Program, that provided grants up to \$10,000 for our most vulnerable small businesses. This was a lifesaver for so many small businesses. This Advance helped businesses get the resources, the immediate cash, without having to worry about an additional loan on their books. Quite frankly, this program, along with strengthening the existing tools that were very important for small businesses, helped save a lot of small businesses.

We also created a debt forgiveness program. For a certain number of months, we would forgive your current 7a loan with the Small Business Administration, or 504 loan. Not just the interest payments but the principal payments were forgiven. And we strengthened the Microloan Program, and we reinforced the Community Advantage 7a Programs.

We did all that. We did this starting in mid-March with the hope that this

pandemic would be over by last summer. We learned a lot from that bill after it passed.

The lessons learned we need now deploy in order to finish the job, to make sure small businesses are protected through this pandemic. So what were the lessons learned? Well, we first learned that the underserved and underbanked community had special needs. This is the minority community. These are businesses located in low-income communities, businesses that don't have traditional banking relations with a commercial bank. They all, in the beginning part of the PPP program, were left behind. Why? Because in order to get the help under the PPP program, you had to find a commercial lender who would make you the loan—100 percent guaranteed by the government, forgivable, so no real risk to the financial institution, but the financial institution wanted to protect their existing customers, and they wanted to make the larger loans because it was more lucrative for them. So the smaller of the small businesses and those that did not have a preferred relationship with bankers had a harder time getting that loan, and that showed up in the numbers we saw when the PPP program started last year.

Now, it is interesting—Senator SHAHEEN and I recognized this as we were crafting the bill, so we put a provision in the CARES Act that said that the SBA needed to prioritize loans for underserved small businesses. We knew that this was a likely thing to happen, so we asked the SBA to make a special effort to deal with the underserved community. They didn't do it. The SBA IG, in its report, said that the SBA did not fully align to congressional intent the way they implemented the PPP as it relates to the underserved community.

It is interesting—a group of stakeholders, of advocates on behalf of minority businesses, started what is known as the Page 30 Coalition. The provision I talked about was on page 30 of the CARES Act. They have been advocating for change ever since.

So starting with the replenishment of the PPP program and continuing in the omnibus bill we just passed in December, we have tried to build up the capacity for the underserved communities. We have done that by putting money aside for mission lenders. In the omnibus bill, there is \$10 billion that was put aside to build up the capacity of CDFIs and minority repository institutions. I want to thank my colleague Senator MARK WARNER of Virginia for his efforts in putting that together. That provided greater capacity for mission lenders, who are more likely to help in the underserved communities, to be there with the capital necessary to participate in the SBA programs.

We also decided that we had to do more than just that. We got set-asides for mission lenders in the act, and we had set-asides for the smaller of the small businesses because the smaller of

the small businesses are the ones that had the greatest need.

Lessons learned from what we did, and that was that the EIDL Program was not set up as Congress intended. When you look at the demographics as to what type of a company uses the EIDL Program as compared to the PPP, the smaller of small businesses, the more vulnerable small businesses, were more likely to use the EIDL Program.

So we anticipated, as I said, the EIDL Advance, which was so important to small businesses that really don't believe they can take out a loan—we anticipated they would get \$10,000. Guess what. The average grant size, as implemented by the Trump administration, was between \$4,000 and \$5,000. The average size of the business that applied for an EIDL Advance was between four and five workers, the real “ma and pa” businesses. But they needed more than \$4,500; they needed \$10,000.

The EIDL loan program by statute could give you a loan up to \$2 million, but the SBA, under the Trump administration, put a cap of \$150,000 on those loans. Again, it compromised the effectiveness of those programs. We need to learn from what we did.

As I said earlier, more help is needed. The proposal that we are looking at in this budget resolution will provide that additional help, and that is why it is so important to pass this budget resolution.

Let me just give you a few of the details of why it is important to move this budget resolution. First, as I said in the onset of my remarks, we have to get this virus under control. The budget that is before us will provide substantial help for the vaccine distributions.

I don't know about what is happening in Minnesota, but I can tell you in Maryland, people are frustrated that we don't have a more efficient system on the distribution of vaccines. We have to answer that.

For the supply chain, use the Defense Production Act, use that in order to get the vaccine distribution done in a way that is fair to the American people. The budget before us will help us achieve that. It will provide the money for testing and protective equipment, which is desperately needed to get the virus under control.

The budget before us will allow us to open schools safely. We need that for American families. We need it for our children, and we need it for small businesses because when schools are closed and children have to stay home, our small businesses suffer. They suffer from their workers not being able to show up to work, and they suffer from the customers not being able to shop.

But we also need direct help for small businesses. In this legislation, there is \$50 billion allocated to the Small Business Administration to deal with the hardest hit small businesses.

Let me just mention where we need to put our attention: in the hospitality

industry. We did that in the previous legislation. In the CARES Act, we made special provisions in regard to the affiliation rules for restaurants. That was the right thing to do. In the omnibus bill, we provided some additional help over and above other businesses under the Paycheck Protection Program's second round, and that was right, but we need to do more.

The National Restaurant Association has informed us that 110,000 restaurants have either closed temporarily or permanently as a result of COVID-19. There are 2.5 million less jobs in restaurants today than at the pre-COVID level. And at the worst point, we were down 8 million jobs in that industry through layoffs and furloughs. So we need to take a look at a special way to help preserve our restaurants because they depend upon groups attending. They depend upon catering. They depend upon the restaurants being fully filled, and they can't do that under COVID-19. So we need to provide some help, and this budget resolution will allow us to do that.

In the omnibus bill, we provided money for shuttered venues. These are our entertainment venues, our museums which have been ordered to be closed. They can't operate because of COVID-19 and government orders.

I will give you one example: Merriweather Post Pavilion located in Howard County, not very far from here. One thousand jobs are impacted. Merriweather Post has not been able to have live entertainment since COVID-19 last March.

We passed legislation to provide help. We need to improve that legislation, and the budget resolution before us will allow us to get that done.

Let's talk about nonprofits for one moment. Johns Hopkins University has told us we lost a million jobs in the nonprofit sector as a result of COVID-19. We have nonprofits that have not been eligible that should be eligible to get help under these packages, and this budget resolution gives us an opportunity to take care of that need.

Then, lastly, let me talk about one of the priorities that President Biden has talked about, and that is getting the information out so small businesses can take advantage of these programs because so many have not taken advantage. They are the most vulnerable. He has what he calls the community navigators. We know from the Affordable Care Act how helpful they can be in getting information out, particularly in hard-served communities, so they understand the tools that are available. They can apply for the tools and get the help that they need.

We build on the community navigators with our resource partners—our women business centers, our minority business centers. Let's build on those centers—our veterans. Let's build on our resource partners in order to make sure that the help really is targeted to the small businesses of greater need.

This budget resolution is a bold approach because the problem is so great. I urge my colleagues to support the budget resolution for so many reasons, but as the incoming chairman of the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, on behalf of America's small businesses, I urge my colleagues to support this budget resolution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, it is good to see you in that Chair, and I am grateful for this opportunity.

I just wanted to raise a couple of issues that are relevant to the budget resolution that we are going to be working on over the next few days and beyond. There are so many issues to highlight. I will only mention two issues—two big issues—but I think, most generally, when I consider what we should do, I think it is my belief that we need a substantial, robust bill to meet the moment that we are in. That means dealing with the pandemic effectively and putting the virus behind us by accelerating vaccinations, making sure that we are taking every step possible to open our schools—to reopen schools, I should say, in some cases.

Thirdly, to make sure we are helping those who are vulnerable, whether they are folks without a job or folks who are hungry or their families are hungry—so many other traumas that have been heaped upon our families. There is a lot to do, and that requires a substantial investment, not a limited investment.

I will just mention two issues today. One is home and community-based services, and the other is childcare and a particular tax credit that is relevant.

Home and community-based services, as many people know, have a huge impact on both older citizens—seniors throughout the country—as well as people with disabilities and even has an impact upon children. I will focus most of the attention, for purposes of today, on the impact on seniors and people with disabilities.

If there is ever a time when a care setting that is in the home or in a community was more beneficial to a senior, to a person with a disability—if there is ever a time, it is now. We know that if someone is living in a congregate setting, they are more likely to get the virus. And we know the horrific numbers. Just about 40 percent of the deaths that have occurred because of the pandemic in the United States have occurred in long-term care settings. It is, as of right now, at last count, approaching 150,000 Americans who lost their lives from the virus who were in long-term care settings.

I think a lot of seniors—a lot of family members would prefer, often, that their loved one is getting care in a home or in a community setting. The same is true, of course, for people with disabilities.

We have a chance in this legislation to finally make an investment in home

and community-based services. Do those services exist right now? They do. How do they exist? Pretty much in the United States by way of a waiver, so it is not the standard policy; it is done by waiver.

We want to make sure that it is more of a standard feature, really, a choice that people have to get the care in the community or in the setting that they want. It is critically important that we have in the reconciliation instructions a commitment to home and community-based services. We have that now, and we want to make sure it remains in the bill in final form.

The other benefit or, I should say, the other priority here is not simply those receiving the care in home and community-based settings; it is those providing the care, those heroic frontline workers who often are not talked about enough who provide this care. Most of the care provided in these settings are provided by low-income women of color who disproportionately make up the workforce and often are making about \$12 an hour. They should have a decent wage. They should have benefits, like sick and family medical leave, and they should have access to PPE protection so that they have the protection they need to do their job and to care for those individuals.

I see the distinguished majority leader.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HASSAN). The majority leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank the Senator from Pennsylvania. I won't be that long.

ORGANIZING RESOLUTION

Madam President, in addition to the organizing resolution to which the Republican leader and I have now agreed, Leader McConnell and I would like to engage in a colloquy regarding certain understandings we have reached on two related issues.

First, I have discussed with the Republican leader concerns that have been raised by many Senators about the floor procedure known as "filling the amendment tree." At various points over the last several decades, Senators have been prevented from actively participating in the legislative process because the ability of Senators to offer and receive votes on amendments has been severely restricted. I appreciate and understand those concerns, and I want to assure Senators that it is my intention to have active and dynamic debates on the many issues and crises facing our Nation today. The 117th Congress will not shirk from the important issues; rather, we will discuss and debate legislative solutions to them. I am a strong supporter of the right of Senators to offer amendments and commit to increase dramatically the number of Member-initiated amendments offered in the 117th Congress. I am also opposed to limiting amendments by "filling the tree" unless dilatory measures prevent the Senate from taking action

and leave no alternative. Senators from both sides will be able to offer amendments. That is how we will operate in the 117th Congress under the new Democratic majority.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I appreciate these assurances from the majority leader. The right to offer amendments is important to Senators on our side as well, and we look forward to full and vigorous debates, including amendments, as the Senate takes up the many important issues before us. On a related note, I have discussed with the majority leader concerns that have been raised about debates on motions to proceed. I think many times cloture has to be filed on a motion to proceed because Members want to ensure they are given the right to offer amendments. Given the assurances regarding the ability of Senators to debate and amend legislation in this Congress, that should help in alleviating that practice. Also, when we are proceeding to bills with broad bipartisan support, it is my hope that we will not need to have lengthy debates on motions to proceed.

The resolution provides that the committee budgets and office space will be divided equally, subject to the customary set-aside for administrative expenses and nondesignated staff. It is our expectation that the details of those arrangements will be negotiated and agreed to by the respective chair and ranking member, in consultation with other members of each committee.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I thank the Republican leader for those assurances and for his cooperation in reaching agreement on the organizing resolution and the understandings we have just described. I look forward to working with him and all Senators to address the many urgent needs confronting our Nation.

RELATIVE TO SENATE PROCEDURE IN THE 117TH CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 27, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 27) relative to Senate procedure in the 117th Congress.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to proceeding to the measure?

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 27) was agreed to.

(The resolution is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

CONSTITUTING THE MAJORITY PARTY'S MEMBERSHIP ON CERTAIN COMMITTEES FOR THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, pursuant to the provisions of S. Res. 27, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 28, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

A resolution (S. Res. 28) to constitute the majority party's membership on certain committees for the One Hundred Seventeenth Congress, or until their successors are chosen.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 28) was agreed to.

(The resolution is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

ELECTING SONCERIA ANN BERRY AS SECRETARY OF THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 29, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 29) electing Sonceria Ann Berry as Secretary of the Senate.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 29) was agreed to.

(The resolution is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

AMENDING S. RES. 458 OF THE NINETY-EIGHTH CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 30, which was submitted earlier today.