

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2851

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, earlier today, President Biden announced his new, revised, supposedly curtailed, social spending plan for America. It seems that the depressing economic numbers, the soaring costs of goods, mounting data that government spending is to blame, or perhaps some more moderate voices within the Democratic conference forced him to walk this latest monstrosity back.

Democrats, who won control with the slimnest of majorities, feel that they have a mandate to change more about American society and spend more money than any group of elected officials in American history.

The White House Chief of Staff tweeted today, bragging that this deal is still twice as big as the New Deal in real dollars.

Be it at \$3.5 trillion or a little less, we have lost almost all sense of what money means, at least when it comes to money being spent by Washington—by public officials who congratulate themselves, each other, and, in return, are congratulated by many in the media for spending other people's money or spending money we don't have, money that ends up, effectively, being printed.

Our Founding Fathers entrusted Congress with the power of the purse because they expected Congress, which is the branch of government most accountable to the people at the most regular intervals, to be most likely to jealously guard the funds of those who sent us here.

Understanding that as every Member of the House is required to stand for election every 2 years, and one-third of the Members of this body are required to stand for election every 2 years, that ought to have an effect. It ought to have precisely the effect that we remember: that it is not our money; it is the people's money, and that when we run out of it, we can't just pretend that we have more. When you do that, it causes problems—especially for the poor and the middle class.

The Framers assumed that Congress would be the most responsible branch in managing our Nation's finances—again, because we are the branch most accountable to the people. But in this respect we failed. We failed in every sense. We failed dismally, miserably.

Americans work for months out of every single year just to pay their Federal taxes. Yet our Nation is still barreling toward \$30 trillion of national debt. We are now reaching devastating debt-to-GDP ratios that we have never contemplated during peacetime in America. And Americans are feeling the pain—real Americans, everyday Americans.

Inflation is at its highest rate in decades. Everything from gas to groceries, from housing to healthcare—it is all more expensive and getting more expensive every single day. We know

from sad experience that this isn't going to go away anytime soon. Prices, once they go up, tend to stick.

Meanwhile, President Biden, apparently, is not satisfied with only making things more expensive, but he is also making it harder and in some cases impossible for many Americans to work. His still-unpublished vaccine mandate is causing millions of Americans to be at risk of losing their employment or, alternatively, acquiescing to Federal medical extortion. These are everyday Americans, all too often struggling just to get by. They are not bad people. They are not people whom we should shun. No. These are mothers and fathers. Some are first responders, and others are military heroes. They are our neighbors, friends, and fellow citizens. They deserve the respect and autonomy to make this decision for themselves.

And the Constitution, when properly followed, protects Americans from precisely this type of Federal intrusion, especially this type of Federal intrusion wielded by one man, one person, in one office.

I have heard now from over 300 Utahans just in the last few weeks who are at risk of losing their livelihoods due to the President's mandate. These are just the ones I have heard from. For every one I have heard from, there are many, many others who are being affected. Their stories are moving, and they are as moving as they are tragic. And we must do something to help.

Allow me to be very clear. While I am very much against the mandate, I am for the vaccine. I have been vaccinated. My entire family has been vaccinated. I have encouraged other people to get vaccinated. These vaccines are helping to protect many, many millions of Americans against the harmful effects of COVID-19.

That does not, however, excuse the heavy-handed, nanny state approach of forcing this decision on Americans, of threatening Americans, coercing them, extorting them into doing the will of the President of the United States. This is not only an action not backed up by law or consistent with the constitutional separation of powers, but it is immoral. And it is mean to tell a mom or a dad you are not going to be able to put food on the table for your children if you don't get a medical procedure that we want you to get but that you don't want to get, for whatever reason: a religious reason, a particular medical condition that you have been warned about from your doctor, or whatever else it may be. People shouldn't have to choose between the ability to make a living and the coerced receipt of an unwanted medical procedure.

This is why I have come to the Senate floor 11 times now to fight against the mandate and why I am going to keep coming. Today, I am offering what should be an incredibly uncontroversial bill. My Transparency in COVID-19 Expenditures Act, which

is cosponsored by Senators BRAUN, LUMMIS, SULLIVAN, and TUBERVILLE, would simply require an audit of COVID-19 relief funding. It would allow Congress to determine what spending in this pandemic worked and what spending did not. It would help us return a little bit of financial oversight and sanity and responsibility and accountability to Congress and to our government.

This information would also allow taxpayers to see how their dollars are being spent and whether they are being spent wisely. It is that simple. And I encourage my colleagues to support the bill.

I would like now to yield time to my friend and distinguished colleague, the Senator from Wyoming.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, I thank the gentleman from Utah.

I wish to address the subject of the President's overreaching vaccine mandates. First, we all recognize the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic spread from Wuhan, China, throughout the world. This virus has taken too many lives: more than 4.7 million around the globe and over 686,000 here in the United States. Each death is a tragedy. My heart goes out to the families who have lost loved ones and suffered from this terrible disease.

Many of those families in Wyoming have reached out to me. I have heard from thousands of constituents concerned about the vaccine, pro and con, but mostly about confusing guidance and particularly about masking—most notably in our schools.

Our response to this pandemic should have been unifying, but, instead, it has sown discord and distrust across our country, and that discord is exacerbated by the Federal Government's extreme overreach.

I want to be clear. I support individuals getting the COVID vaccine. I am vaccinated. I got vaccinated to protect myself because I have no natural immunity. I haven't had COVID. I have no underlying health concerns. I was not advised by a physician not to get it. It made sense for me making that decision for myself.

Scientists have been researching and working for decades to make the emergency treatments that we have all had access to in 2021 available to us. However, I do not support the government mandating—mandating—matters that come between a patient and their conscience, a patient and their healthcare provider, a patient and their own care decisions.

And the recent mandates from the Biden administration do just that. I believe they are far-reaching and burdensome, as do my constituents, including those who have been vaccinated. They will not achieve the desired result. They will not convince millions of Americans on the fence about the vaccine to suddenly get it. They cause people to dig in. They further politicize

our healthcare system. They compound our unemployment problems.

Don't take my word for it. Look at the Federal Government itself. Even unions are opposed to a vaccine mandate, with the American Postal Workers Union, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, and the American Federation of Teachers coming out in opposition not to the vaccine but to the mandate.

The pandemic does not make the Constitution irrelevant or put our rights as private citizens up for discussion. We are a nation of liberties, not mandates. We respect individuals.

That is why I am cosponsoring several different bills that would protect our citizens from this overreach. One bill, S. 2849, clarifies that Federal Agencies do not have the power to mandate COVID-19 vaccines. While this should be self-evident, sadly, many in Washington, DC, have forgotten about America's founding principles.

Another bill, S. 2843, blocks Federal Agencies from fining anyone who violates the COVID-19 mandates.

Further, the bill that Senator LEE is offering today, S. 2851, audits COVID funding so the American people know where their tax dollars went over the past year and a half, so we can evaluate what has worked and what has not, as Senator LEE has said.

The Biden administration should work to bring us together, not drive us further apart through politicized Executive actions. No matter what President Biden decides to do, an individual's right to be in charge of their own healthcare is sacrosanct, and I believe Senator LEE's bills are a step in the right direction.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2851 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I reserve the right to object. I certainly welcome the Senator from Utah's interest in oversight of coronavirus emergency relief funds. There is no question Americans deserve to know where their hard-earned tax dollars are going and how these critical relief funds are being used to help communities all across our country in the wake of this public health crisis, especially for those who need it the most.

I am also thankful that my colleague agreed with the importance of conducting thorough oversight of these programs and supported the creation of

the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee when we passed the CARES Act. These oversight requirements, based on the successful oversight model of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, ensure that we have strong oversight of all coronavirus relief dollars through regular, detailed reports and recommendations from the PRAC, the GAO, and the inspector general.

Following guidance from the Office of Management and Budget, all COVID-19 relief funding from the legislation that the Senator has identified is already being tracked on USASpending.gov. Anyone—anyone—can go to the website right now and see the figures.

As of August 31, Congress has provided \$4.7 trillion in relief spending. The administration has committed \$3.9 trillion of those funds to helping communities, and \$3.4 trillion in assistance has already reached those who need help through this crisis.

I would also urge the Senator to consult the more than 1,300 oversight reports that the PRAC has already completed related to the pandemic response, in addition to the more than 100 reports that the GAO has also issued on this topic, rather than creating additional and redundant work for the GAO at taxpayer expense.

The Senator's proposal is duplicative and unnecessary, and for that reason I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I appreciate the insight from my friend, colleague, and distinguished Senator from Michigan. I appreciate his willingness to look out for making sure that there isn't duplication in government.

I also think it is important that at a time when we are spending an unprecedented amount of money, that we are on the side of redoubling efforts to audit, to oversee.

There has never been a time in American history when we have brought in more money than we have brought in in the year 2020. We brought in over \$3 trillion. But there has never been a time when we have spent nearly as much money in total dollars or as far as a number of dollars relative to what we brought in.

I mean, we spent \$6.6 trillion last year. This is an enormous amount of money. We are spending a comparable amount again this year—again, trillions of dollars more than we are bringing in. We are doing it ostensibly because of the COVID pandemic. And for that reason, it is good that we make sure that we know where we are spending that money, where it is going. If it can make our efforts more effective and more efficient, if this is about protecting and sustaining life, then why wouldn't we want to make sure that it is being done in the most effective, efficient way possible?

We work for the people. They deserve to know where the money is being spent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in support of our men and women in uniform who put their lives on the line each day to defend our freedoms and our American way of life.

Unfortunately, thousands of our heroes are about to lose those very freedoms that they have fought so hard to defend, as Joe Biden's vaccine mandate is threatening them with a dishonorable discharge should they choose not to get the COVID vaccine.

Now, let me be clear, as a physician and a veteran, I am confident the vaccine has saved countless lives, and I encourage every veteran, every American to consider and to discuss with their physician getting that vaccine. I believe vaccinating our servicemembers, though, against COVID-19 is such a very, very important effort. But deep down inside, I am still this real doctor from Great Bend, KS, and I believe in the sanctity of the physician-patient relationship and that every one of our situations is unique.

A soldier's clinical history is unique. There are pros and cons; there are risks and benefits of taking this vaccine. And each of our soldiers all are using common sense—the common sense that God has given them, and I respect their decisions. This administration should too.

Right now, thousands of our servicemembers are not vaccinated. When it comes to our guardsmen and -women in Kansas, only 58 percent are fully or partially vaccinated—a number I am confident would hold true across the remainder of the country.

Unfortunately, the policy out of the White House says that one size has to fit all; that there is no exception, even though we know that natural immunity to COVID is the same as, if not more powerful than, the vaccine.

We have never asked people—especially military folks—to get a vaccine for a virus they are already immune to or a virus that doesn't affect them. It just doesn't make sense.

Because of Joe Biden's vaccine mandate, thousands of American heroes are going to be separated from the service, and they are going to, perhaps, be given a dishonorable discharge.

I want to make sure this body and the American people understand exactly what the significance of a dishonorable discharge is. Soldiers will lose access to medical benefits from the VA. They will lose access to home loans from the VA. They will lose access to the GI bill for further education. They will potentially lose their right to vote in some States. They will lose their Second Amendment rights and access to ammunition. They will lose military funeral honors. They will lose the ability to reenlist in another branch of military. And they will have an extremely difficult time finding employment.