

Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to concur in the House amendment to S. 1605, an act to designate the National Pulse Memorial located at 1912 South Orange Avenue in Orlando, Florida, and for other purpose.

Charles E. Schumer, Tina Smith, Martin Heinrich, Patty Murray, Tammy Duckworth, Tim Kaine, Gary C. Peters, Angus S. King, Jr., Richard J. Durbin, Jack Reed, Brian Schatz, Margaret Wood Hassan, Jacky Rosen, Chris Van Hollen, Jeanne Shaheen, Christopher Murphy, Debbie Stabenow.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to concur in the House amendment to S. 1605, an act to designate the National Pulse Memorial located at 1912 South Orange Avenue in Orlando, Florida, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 86, nays 13, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 496 Ex.]

YEAS—86

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Baldwin | Graham | Peters |
| Barrasso | Grassley | Reed |
| Bennet | Hagerty | Risch |
| Blackburn | Hassan | Romney |
| Blumenthal | Hawley | Rosen |
| Blunt | Heinrich | Rounds |
| Booker | Hickenlooper | Rubio |
| Boozman | Hirono | Sasse |
| Brown | Hoeven | Schatz |
| Burr | Hyde-Smith | Schumer |
| Cantwell | Inhofe | Scott (FL) |
| Capito | Johnson | Scott (SC) |
| Carper | Kaine | Shahen |
| Casey | Kelly | Shelby |
| Cassidy | Kennedy | Sinema |
| Collins | King | Smith |
| Coons | Klobuchar | Stabenow |
| Cornyn | Lankford | Sullivan |
| Cortez Masto | Leahy | Tester |
| Cotton | Lujan | Thune |
| Cramer | Manchin | Tillis |
| Crapo | Marshall | Tuberville |
| Cruz | McConnell | Van Hollen |
| Daines | Menendez | Warner |
| Duckworth | Moran | Warnock |
| Durbin | Murkowski | Whitehouse |
| Ernst | Murphy | Wicker |
| Feinstein | Murray | Young |
| Fischer | Ossoff | |

NAYS—13

| | | |
|------------|---------|--------|
| Braun | Merkley | Toomey |
| Cardin | Padilla | Warren |
| Gillibrand | Paul | Wyden |
| Lee | Portman | |
| Markey | Sanders | |

NOT VOTING—1

Lummis

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). On this vote, the yeas are 86, the nays are 13.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Cloture having been invoked, the Senate will resume legislative session to resume consideration of the House message to accompany S. 1605, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Resolved, That the bill from the Senate (S. 1605) entitled "An Act to designate the National Pulse Memorial located at 1912 South Orange Avenue in Orlando, Florida, and for other purposes," do pass with an amendment.

Pending:

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House of Representatives to the bill.

Schumer motion to concur in the amendment of the House of Representatives to the bill, with Schumer amendment No. 4880 (to the House amendment), to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 4881 (to amendment No. 4880), to modify the effective date.

Schumer motion to refer the message of the House on the bill to the Committee on Armed Services, with instructions, Schumer amendment No. 4882, to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 4883 (to the instructions (amendment No. 4882) of the motion to refer), to modify the effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 4884 (to amendment No. 4883), to modify the effective date.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion to refer, and the amendments pending thereto, fall.

The majority leader.

RELATING TO INCREASING THE DEBT LIMIT—Motion to Proceed

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 184, S.J. Res. 33.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 33) relating to increasing the debt limit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on the motion.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS.)

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 49, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 497 Leg.]

YEAS—50

| | | |
|------------|----------|--------------|
| Baldwin | Brown | Casey |
| Bennet | Cantwell | Coons |
| Blumenthal | Cardin | Cortez Masto |
| Booker | Carper | Duckworth |

Durbin
Feinstein
Gillibrand
Hassan
Heinrich
Hickenlooper
Hirono
Kaine
Kelly
King
Klobuchar
Leahy
Lujan

Manchin
Markey
Menendez
Merkley
Murphy
Murray
Ossoff
Padilla
Peters
Reed
Rosen
Sanders
Schatz

Schumer
Shaheen
Sinema
Smith
Stabenow
Tester
Van Hollen
Warner
Warnock
Warren
Whitehouse
Wyden

NAYS—49

Barrasso
Blackburn
Blunt
Boozman
Braun
Burr
Capito
Cassidy
Collins
Cornyn
Cotton
Cramer
Crapo
Cruz
Daines
Ernst
Fischer

Graham
Grassley
Hagerty
Hawley
Hoeven
Hyde-Smith
Inhofe
Johnson
Kennedy
Lankford
Lee
Marshall
McConnell
Moran
Murkowski
Paul
Portman

Risch
Romney
Rounds
Rubio
Sasse
Scott (FL)
Scott (SC)
Shelby
Sullivan
Thune
Tillis
Toomey
Tuberville
Wicker
Young

NOT VOTING—1

Lummis

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SINEMA). On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 49.

The motion is agreed to.

RELATING TO INCREASING THE DEBT LIMIT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the joint resolution.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 33) relating to increasing the debt limit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to the provisions of Public Law 117-71, there will now be 10 hours of debate on the joint resolution, equally divided between the chairman and the ranking member of the Committee on Finance.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess until 2:15 p.m. and that all time during recess count equally against both sides on the joint resolution.

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

Mr. DURBIN. For the information of Senators, we expect a rollcall vote on the passage of S.J. Res. 33 to occur at approximately 4 p.m. today.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:09 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. SINEMA).

RELATING TO INCREASING THE DEBT LIMIT—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, after months of delay with NDAA, it has finally made its way to the Senate floor. The Senate Armed Services Committee passed its version by a strong, bipartisan vote of 23 to 3, and that was back in July.

As a member of the Armed Services Committee since my first day here in the Senate, I have been proud to help draft this bill each year since 2013, and I was honored to play a part in drafting the bill this year.

First and foremost, the 2022 NDAA takes care of the greatest asset America has—our men and women in uniform. It supports a well-deserved pay raise for members of the military, and it reauthorizes important special pays and bonuses.

Keeping faith with our All-Volunteer Forces is essential so that our military men and women are able to focus on combating the threats that our Nation faces abroad. You don't have to look far to see the threats I am talking about.

Vladimir Putin has placed nearly 100,000 Russian troops right on Russia's border with Ukraine, essentially posturing to invade a sovereign country. China continues to make shocking progress in developing new types of weapons. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that China's recent test of a fractional orbital bombardment system was very close to a "Sputnik moment." This new missile could potentially carry a nuclear warhead anywhere in the world, and it was specifically designed to evade U.S. defenses. Our adversaries are making huge strides forward. The NDAA recognizes that and addresses it.

This bill will keep the modernization of our strategic nuclear deterrent on schedule. This is crucial because even though our nuclear forces are still effective, we have pushed our weapons far beyond their designed lifetimes—in some cases, by decades. This bill authorizes the resources necessary to keep modernization on track, and it will help make sure the next generation of systems is available before our current nuclear triad ages out.

Perhaps most importantly, the NDAA tries to keep defense spending on pace with rising inflation. Inflation is at its highest level in decades, and it doesn't look like it is slowing down anytime soon.

The Biden administration originally proposed a top-line defense spending increase of just 1.6 percent. That would not have kept pace with inflation even in a normal year, but in a year when it is threatening to spiral out of control, it would have meant an unacceptable cut in resources for our military. The NDAA takes this year's runaway inflation into account. It offers an increase of \$25 billion on top of President Biden's proposal, and we came together across party lines to agree to that because it is what our military needs.

At the risk of stating the obvious, the NDAA is about investing in our na-

tional defense. It is in the name, the "National Defense Authorization Act." But every State contributes in its own way to that national goal, and I am proud to say that this bill will bring some major wins to Nebraska, which has a long and rich military history.

It includes \$100 million for the National Disaster Recovery Fund, which will help rebuild Offutt Air Force Base, the home of the Air Force's 55th Wing and U.S. Strategic Command, after the devastating flooding that Nebraska experienced in 2019. It recognizes how critical the 55th Wing is to our Nation's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities. Their missions take them all over the world, but they are proudly based in my State of Nebraska.

The men and women who wear American military uniforms are part of the best fighting force the world has ever known. Our job here in Congress is to give them what they need, and this year's NDAA does just 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. LEE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

BUILD BACK BETTER ACT

Mr. LEE. Madam President, in her 1993 Nobel lecture, Toni Morrison—no conservative—told a story of an old woman who was approached by a group of kids, mocking her and asking her to offer her conjecture:

Old woman, I hold in my hand a bird. Tell me whether it is living or dead.

The blind, old woman was revered for her wisdom and experience.

She responded:

I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands.

The old woman, of course, meant whether the bird is alive or dead is the responsibility of the person who holds it.

Morrison said:

The blind woman shifts attention away from assertions of power to the instrument through which that power is exercised.

Now, Morrison could have been talking about Congress. I will leave to your judgment who in Congress is a mocking youth and who is the old woman, but in politics it is the instrument of power rather than the assertion of power that matters.

Just this last week, the instruments of power were used, despite assertions otherwise, to quietly pave the way for the Democrats' "Destroy America" bill, which they have called Build Back Better. Congress used a novel procedure to pass a bill, giving Democrats a blank check to raise the debt ceiling to pay for Build Back Better. Procedural

jujitsu is hardly the stuff of base-motivating campaign rhetoric, but it is the instrument of power.

Now I will describe how this happened, but a bit of background is necessary.

Like most legislation in the Senate, raising the debt ceiling, which has been done now 99 times since the end of the Second World War, ordinarily requires 60 votes, which, in an evenly divided Senate, means Democrats and Republicans have to work together to find an acceptable outcome.

There is, of course, an exception that would allow Democrats to use a special budget reconciliation procedure to raise the debt ceiling without Republican help, with a simple majority vote—a simple majority vote that they could achieve if all 50 Democrats cast their votes. If there is an evenly divided vote at the end of the day, it can be broken by the Vice President. But they didn't want to use this special procedure, and I believe they didn't want to use it for two independent reasons.

First, it was inconvenient. The special reconciliation procedure would require too many steps and too much time for their tastes. Still, I don't know of a single Republican Senator, myself included, who would unduly stall the Democrats from proceeding to its consideration. In fact, under the rules, if they follow the right steps, it is, more or less, a guaranteed outcome, one that doesn't require a supermajority and, at the end of the day, can be accomplished with a simple majority.

Second, I suspect that Democrats didn't want to bear the political cost of raising the debt ceiling without some Republican cover. This would ordinarily mean using the standard 60-vote process, but that is not how it happened. Instead of Democrats and Republicans working together to find consensus on the appropriate way to raise the debt ceiling, likely in exchange for spending reforms, some combination of Senate and House leadership concocted a new mechanism.

On a 60-vote bill, Republicans agreed to let Democrats pass an entirely separate bill to raise the debt ceiling—without any Republican votes—by whatever amount they want. So, rather than negotiating a reasonable number, Republicans agreed to ensure that the debt ceiling was increased by as many trillions of dollars as the Democrats might need to fulfill their agenda. There is an actual blank space in the bill where Democrats can write in whatever number they want.

In exchange, Republicans would be protected from scrutiny for insisting that Democrats follow the established rules for raising the debt ceiling through the reconciliation procedure and would be able to launder this vote to appear as something other than helping Democrats raise the debt ceiling, which they had publicly committed—in writing, no less—not to do.

To make matters worse, congressional leadership tied this to a bill preventing automatic Medicare cuts. This sent a clear message: Give Democrats a blank check or there would be Medicare cuts. Some of my Republican colleagues couldn't allow them to shoot that hostage, that hostage being held captive by Democrats.

The playbook is written. The idea that this is a onetime thing or is somehow similar to other expedited procedures—for example, those found under the Congressional Review Act to disapprove of executive Agency rules—is preposterous. The comparison doesn't work. These are very different creatures. I am sure this vicious tactic, the one used here, has not seen its last use—far from it. I am certain it will be used in the future to enact other progressive agenda items, including many that are simply unable to garner the 60 votes necessary under the normal and transparent Senate filibuster rules.

With a blank check and a new special procedure, Democrats are able to raise the debt ceiling by whatever amount they deem necessary to accommodate their “Destroy America” bill, which they call Build Back Better. They have set that price—and we know this now as of just the last few hours—at \$2.5 trillion. This is the behemoth bill that would seek to grant a form of amnesty to illegal aliens; to further the Green New Deal agenda; to overturn State right-to-work laws; to increase vaccine mandate fines on private employers to \$700,000; to infuse critical race theory indoctrination into medical care; and to grow the IRS by 87,000 agents. That isn't even the tip of the iceberg.

The blank check to remake America was a gift to progressives from those within the Republican Party who decided to grant it. I regret deeply their decision to do so, and the filibuster—the major instrument of power preserving the unique identity of the U.S. Senate—was all it cost.

As to who was the old woman and who were the mocking children from Toni Morrison's story, I can't say, but America is the bird.

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.

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

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

INFLATION

Ms. COLLINS. Madam President, on Friday, the Department of Labor reported that inflation had hit a near-40-year high, confirming what many American families have been feeling in their wallets for many months.

The soaring cost of virtually everything, from gasoline to groceries, is a growing crisis that has hit families across our Nation. The numbers are alarming.

During the past year, the Consumer Price Index, which measures the price of goods and services, jumped by nearly 7 percent. That is the highest rate since 1982. It represents the sixth consecutive month of inflation exceeding 5 percent.

The goods experiencing the greatest increases read like a list of everyday essentials. Energy costs are up by 33 percent. Used vehicles are up by 31 percent. Hamburger costs are up by 14 percent. Milk, eggs, baby food, furniture, and many other necessities all cost more, and those prices are simply unsustainable for many working families.

The pain is being felt across the Nation, including in my State of Maine. I have heard from many Mainers worried about how they will be able to afford to heat their homes this winter. The average price of heating oil in Maine is currently \$3.15 per gallon, compared to \$2.11 per gallon this time last year. While the amount of heating oil a household uses varies considerably, a typical Maine family will spend nearly \$1,000 more this year on home heating oil. The State of Maine is disproportionately affected by this rise in costs since more than 60 percent of our homes use fuel oil as their primary energy source for heating compared to only 4 percent of households nationally.

The rise in the price of heating oil is not the only hardship that Mainers are facing this winter. Mainers have shared with me their genuine concerns about being able to afford to drive back and forth to work and to put nutritious food on the table. Gas prices in Maine are about \$1.30 per gallon higher than last year.

Business owners face the often impossible challenge of paying higher prices for commodities, food, and supplies without passing those increases on to their already struggling consumers. For example, Maine restaurant owners, who have already experienced an extraordinarily difficult 18 months due to the pandemic, are now grappling with double-digit percentage increases in the costs of ingredients and other goods needed to run their businesses. An owner of a restaurant I visited in Searsport told me that the cost of fryer grease has skyrocketed from \$19 to \$48 per case. Another restaurant owner in Rockland recently told the Bangor Daily News that the price for prime ribs has more than doubled from \$7 to \$17. These supply costs shrink their already slim margins and exacerbate other difficulties the industry is facing with staffing shortages and pandemic-related closures.

After a tough 2020 caused by COVID-related market disruptions and drought, Maine's resilient potato growers rebounded with yields up 20 percent over last year. Such a strong harvest usually would be cause for celebration, but farmers are facing rising transportation, fuel, and fertilizer costs that are hurting their bottom line and forcing

them to pass on some of the inflationary costs to their customers. The increased costs of doing business mean that families and processors will pay more for potatoes and growers will get a lower return on their crop.

This weekend, the Wall Street Journal reported on how inflation is harming the employees at the One Stop Tulsa gas station in Aroostook County in Northern Maine. One clerk was working 60 hours each week—up from 40 before the pandemic—because they are so shortstaffed. Even with the increased hours, she said she is struggling with rising costs, from food to electricity.

Melissa Holmes, the gas station manager, said that her twice monthly grocery bill has increased from \$300 to \$500 and it now costs her \$60 to fill up her 2011 Ford Explorer. That is \$20 more than last year.

Ms. Holmes also described facing customers who are frustrated by the higher prices. The cost of chicken, for example, has gone up so an order of chicken tenders has jumped from \$5.49 to \$8.99. That is a big increase, and customers are feeling that squeeze.

After passage of the President's \$1.9 trillion stimulus this spring, the price of goods and services went up. We heard reassurances from the President's team that this inflation was transitory but no acknowledgement of the role that their policies have had on soaring prices. Americans are feeling the consequences as Washington has overheated the economy.

We in Congress must confront this inflation crisis, but instead the Biden administration is pushing trillions in additional macroeconomic stimulus in the President's Build Back Better plan. The consequences for an already overheated economy could be devastating. Given the clear link between recent extraordinary government spending and rampant inflation, we should not be adding more fuel to the fire. Our economy is ailing so it would be wise to begin to follow the maxim that guides medical professionals: First, do no harm.

Democrats have said that their spending spree, which follows the Build Back Better plan, would cost \$1.7 trillion. Several of the proposals in that plan would be set to expire after 1, 3, or 5 years—a gimmick that hides the true cost because we know that is not what the real hope is nor what is going to happen.

Last week, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projected that making the social spending programs in the Build Back Better plan permanent would, in fact, cost \$4.9 trillion over the decade—\$4.9 trillion. Doing so would add \$3 trillion to the deficit unless paid for with even more taxes beyond those that the Democrats have already proposed in their bill. That is much higher than the purported \$1.7 trillion pricetag because we know that the ultimate goal is to make these expensive programs permanent.

Inflation is a regressive tax. It does not discriminate among the rich and the poor. It does not take into account the ability to pay. It is a cruel tax, one that punishes thrift by diminishing the value of savings. This is damaging to families who are saving to buy a home or for their children's education. It can be devastating to our seniors, who can do nothing but helplessly watch as the retirement funds that they have worked for their whole lives don't go nearly as far as they had expected.

Like the pandemic itself, we do not know for certain whether this inflation crisis will abate, be prolonged, or even accelerate. Our immediate focus should be on measures that we know will have a lasting and beneficial impact on our economy, such as implementing the bipartisan infrastructure law, opening up and repairing our supply chains, getting more Americans back to work, and protecting the earnings of hard-working Americans.

What we should not do is pass trillions of dollars in additional spending in the administration's Build Back Better bill that would exacerbate the toll that inflation imposes on seniors, working families, and small businesses. We should not take that risk.

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

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

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. WARNOCK. Madam President, I come to the floor today after a long week of wrestling with my conscience. Before we left Washington last week, we in this Chamber made a change in the Senate's rules in order to push forward something that all of us think is important. We set the stage to raise the Nation's debt ceiling.

Yet as we cast that vote to begin addressing the debt ceiling, this same Chamber is allowing the ceiling of our democracy to crash in around us. The American people have been pushing for leaders in Washington to address voting rights.

Everywhere I turn, I have been hearing from my constituents in Georgia. They are deeply worried. I heard it all weekend. I have been hearing it over the last several months.

And I submit that they are worried for good reason. They know their history. They are witnessing what is happening to our democracy in real time, and they see the handwriting on the wall. They see the sweeping voter suppression proposals in 49 States and the dozens of new laws that have now popped up across the Nation, fueled by the Big Lie that seeks to delegitimize the voices of millions of Georgians and Americans who made their voices heard, made history, and, more impor-

tantly, made a difference last November and last January.

The American people see what is happening in Arizona and in Texas and in Florida and in Wisconsin and in Iowa. They see what is happening in Georgia, my home State, where a new law, SB 202—passed right after I won—will make it harder for some voters to access their ballots by making it more difficult to vote by mail, allowing far fewer drop boxes, and only allowing for the use of those boxes—listen—during business hours. You can use the drop boxes during business hours, which sort of defeats the purpose of having a drop box. In fact, back home, the second most senior Republican in the Georgia State Senate announced recently that he wants to do away with election drop boxes altogether—literal boxes where registered, eligible voters simply can drop off their ballots on their way to the night shift or on their way back home. It seems to me that they want fewer voters and more dark money in our elections, and that is the sad place we are in right now.

But what is even more disconcerting is that these politicians in the State legislature have already laid the tracks to take over local boards of elections, for almost any frivolous reason, to undermine the voices of local voters and local election administrators, control the count, muddy the waters, question or determine the outcome.

In the face of this crisis, the question is this: Has this Chamber risen to the occasion to take on the issue of voting rights, which I submit is the central moral issue confronting this Congress in this moment? What have we done to strengthen access to the ballot as bedrock voting rights protections have been shredded by our courts or to protect the sacred right to vote as partisan State legislatures have passed laws to dilute that right for so many people?

Well, some of us have acted. Democrats in this body have tried not once, not twice, but we have tried this Congress on three occasions to consider legislation to protect and expand voting rights so that more eligible Americans can make their voices heard and help shape the direction of our country. Each time—whether it was the For the People Act or the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act or the Freedom to Vote Act—with just one lone exception, all of our friends across the aisle have refused to engage with us in any way to address the growing barriers to what is basic to American democracy: the ballot box.

Here is what we have said. We have said to our Republican friends: If you don't like this provision or that provision, let's talk about it. Offer some amendments. Come, let us reason together. Let us have a debate out in the open so that the American people can hear it.

Everybody talks about the divisions in America right now. Here is what folks on the left and the right agree on:

There is something awry in our democracy. In this moment in which there is this debate happening on the outside, how is it that we refuse to even have a debate in the Senate? They don't even want to have a debate.

So here we are. Months have passed. No, that is not true—years have passed. Democrats have tried again and again to engage our Republican friends in a discussion on this issue—one that lies at the foundation of our democracy—and time and time again, because of a lack of good-faith engagement, the rules of the Senate have prevented us from moving that conversation forward.

We could not imagine changing the rules—that is, until last week, because last week, we did exactly that. Be very clear. Last week, we changed the rules of the Senate to address another important issue: the economy. This is a step—a change in the Senate rules—we haven't been willing to take to save our broken democracy but one that a bipartisan majority of this Chamber thought was necessary in order to keep our economy strong. We changed the rules to protect the full faith and credit of the U.S. Government. We have decided we must do it for the economy but not for the democracy.

I will be honest. This has been a difficult week for me as I pondered how am I going to vote on this debt ceiling question we are about to take. I feel like I am being asked to take a road that is a point of moral dissonance for me because while I deeply believe that both our democracy and our economy are important, I believe that it is misplaced to change the Senate rules only for the benefit of the economy when the warning lights on our democracy are flashing at the same time.

I happen to believe that our democracy is at least as important as the economy. Ours is a great nation built upon both free enterprise and free exercise of basic democratic rights. You cannot have good capitalism without freedom. Each is strengthened by the other, and together they make for a nation that is both prosperous and free, a nation where everybody can breathe and every child has a chance to live up to her highest potential.

So I stand here because of my children. I have two precious children, and I think every day what kind of country I want them to grow up in. I stand here today because we are in a place where we are dealing with the consequence of misaligned values and misplaced priorities, and that is, for me, a serious problem because I lead Ebenezer Baptist Church, where John Lewis worshipped and where Dr. King preached. I asked myself all weekend as I wrestled with how I would vote—I asked myself, what would Dr. King do?

I thought this week about Dr. King's speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial—no, not the 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech but the one he gave the first time he spoke in front of the Lincoln Memorial in 1957, where he addressed

what he called “all types of conniving methods” that were getting in the way of the free exercise of the constitutional right to vote. His rallying cry that day in 1957 was “Give Us the Ballot.”

In light of the conniving methods of voter suppression we have seen enacted into law since the January 6 attack on the Capitol, I come to the floor today to share with the people of Georgia and the American people the message that I shared with my colleagues over the weekend and earlier today during our caucus meeting.

I said to my Democratic colleagues over the last several days—No. 1—unfortunately, the vast majority of our Republican friends have made it clear that they have no intention of trying to work with us to address voter suppression or to protect voting rights. They have embodied by their actions the sentiments of conservative strategist Paul Weyrich, who dared say in 1981: “I don’t want everybody to vote.” That is what he said. “Elections are not won by a majority of the people. They never have been from the beginning of our country and they are not now. As a matter of fact,” he went on to say, “our leverage in the elections quite candidly goes up as the voting populace goes down.”

The second thing I said to my Democratic colleagues today is that while we cannot let our Republican friends off the hook for not being equitable governing partners, if we are serious about protecting the right to vote that is under assault right now, here is the truth: It will fall to Democrats to do it. If Democrats alone must raise the debt ceiling, then Democrats alone must raise and repair the ceiling of our democracy. How do we in good conscience justify doing one and not the other?

Some of my Democratic colleagues are saying: But what about bipartisanship? Isn’t that important?

I say: Of course it is, but here is the thing we must remember. Slavery was bipartisan. Jim Crow’s segregation was bipartisan. The refusal of women’s suffrage was bipartisan. The denial of the basic dignity of members of the LGBTQ community has long been bipartisan. The Three-fifths Compromise was the creation of a putative national unity at the expense of Black people’s basic humanity.

So when colleagues in this Chamber talk to me about bipartisanship, which I believe in, I just have to ask, at whose expense? Who is being asked to foot the bill for this bipartisanship, and is liberty itself the cost? I submit that is a price too high and a bridge too far.

So I struggled this weekend. I talked to folk I believe in. Among them, I spoke with Reverend Ambassador Andrew Young, who was with Dr. King until the very end, about this vote. I talked to Ambassador Young, and I asked him: What do you think?

He said: I try not to worry, but I am worried about our country.

Then this 89-year-old, battle-worn soldier in the nonviolent army of the Lord drew silent on the phone, and then he said to me: Tell your colleagues that among your constituent are people who literally laid their lives on the line for the basic right to vote. They lost friends. They lost so much.

And so this is a real moral quandary for me, and it makes it difficult for me to cast this vote today. But after many conversations with colleagues, with Georgians, with experts who know the economy, with voting rights advocates, and civil rights leaders, I will, indeed, vote today with anguish. I will vote to raise the debt ceiling.

I am voting yes because I am thinking about the kids in the Kayton Homes Housing Projects where I grew up in Savannah, GA. I am thinking about the hard-working families pushing to recover from the pressures of this pandemic, those on the margins and those who are least resilient, for whom a collapse of the economy would be catastrophic. Ironically, many of these are the same people who are also being targeted by the voter suppression efforts I mentioned earlier. I am thinking of them and the people of Georgia as I cast my vote today to raise the debt ceiling.

But I am also thinking about what we need to do to keep our democracy and our economy strong today and for the next generation. Once we handle the debt ceiling, the Senate needs to make voting rights the very next issue we take up. We must do voting rights, and we must deal with this issue now.

Let me be clear. I am so proud of what we did with the bipartisan infrastructure bill and the major economic investments we are putting the finishing touches on that will close the Medicaid coverage gap and deliver historic relief for Georgia farmers and expand broadband access and so much more.

I have to tell you that the most important thing that we can do in this Congress is to get voting rights done. Voting rights are preservative of all other rights. They lay the ground for all of the other debates.

So to my Democratic colleagues, I say, while it is deeply unfortunate, it is more than apparent that it has been left to us to handle alone the task of safeguarding our democracy. Sadly, many of our Republican friends have already cast their vote with voter suppression.

So the judgment of history is upon us. Future generations will ask when the democracy was in a 9-1-1 state of emergency, what did you do to put the fire out? Did we rise to the moment or did we hide behind procedural rules? I believe that we Democrats can figure out how to get this done, even if that requires a change in the rules, which we established just last week that we can do when the issue is important enough.

Well, the people of Georgia and across the country are saying that vot-

ing rights are important enough. I think that voting rights are important enough so we cannot delay. We must continue to urge the party of Lincoln not to give into the very forces of voter suppression that Dr. King described in that 1957 speech while standing in the shadow of Lincoln. But even as we do that, we cannot wait. We cannot wait on them. With uncanny and eerie relevance, Dr. King’s words summon us to this very moment. He said:

The hour is late. The clock of destiny is ticking out. We must act now before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

BUILD BACK BETTER ACT

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I learned a long time ago, I never want to give a speech after that, but certainly I agree with what Senator WARNOCK said, and the Senate schedule kind of made me do this.

I want to thank Senator WARNOCK, who is one of the principals in our legislation, Senator BENNET, Senator BOOKER, and Senator KAINE for their leadership and their work to deliver what is, pure and simple, the largest tax cut for working families ever.

Tomorrow, for the sixth month in a row—July 15, August 15, September, October, November. Tomorrow is the sixth month in a row that Ohio parents, 92 percent of parents in Ohio with children under 18, will again see \$250 or \$300 in their bank accounts or in their mailbox per child. If they have two infant children, they will get \$600.

This is the most consequential thing we have done in decades to make people’s hard work pay off. We know how hard parents work at their jobs, at raising kids. Any parent knows how much work it is to take care of children, especially young children. It has only gotten harder over the last couple of years. Often, that hard work doesn’t pay off like it should. We have seen what has happened over the past decades. Productivity has gone up; the stock market has soared; executive compensation is stratospheric; but wages have been flat.

Workers’ paychecks are finally—finally, during this administration and this Senate, this Congress—finally, because of the work we are doing, workers’ paychecks are starting to go up. But after decades of stagnation, we have a long way to go.

Meanwhile, parents know how expensive it is to raise kids. Healthcare, school lunches, diapers, clothes, school supplies, braces, sports fees, camp fees—the list never seems to end.

Of course, one of the biggest, if not the biggest expense for so many families is childcare. Parents feel like they are trapped. They can’t keep up no matter how hard they work. They work more hours to provide for their family. They have to put their money right back into childcare. Sometimes the extra money in their paycheck doesn’t even cover the extra daycare costs.

That is why Senators BOOKER and KAINE and BENNET and WARNOCK worked so hard to enact the child tax credit. As I said, the largest—it is a \$3,000 tax cut so 92 percent of the families in my State with children get at least a \$3,000 tax cut. It is the same in Virginia, same in New Jersey, the same in Georgia. It is about finally—finally—making parents' hard work pay off so they can keep up with the costs of raising a family.

I was talking to Senator KAINE, and I know he is going to say some of the same things. Let me share a handful of some really quick stories or comments that people have gone on our website and posted at the 15th of the month.

Kristen from Columbus says she is using this money to pay for "daycare. For two kids it is \$600 a week."

Alex in Cleveland:

Every penny is going to daycare. 4 kids in daycare is around \$800/week.

CeCe said her tax cut helps her pay for daycare. She said:

Daycare is the same amount as my mortgage payment for 4 days a week! So this is so, so helpful!

Courtney from Southeast Ohio in Athens:

[S]lightly more than half the cost of part time daycare tuition per month here in Athens—much appreciated help getting kiddo back into childcare . . . keeping me and my husband in the workforce.

Brittany said:

Daycare.

Ellie said:

Daycare.

They also mean parents can afford to work and can afford to keep up with all the extra costs of raising kids.

Katie in Akron:

Help[s] [to] pay for school supplies.

Caitlin:

Pay for preschool for my son.

Lyndsay:

Back to school clothes.

Fern:

It will pay for preschool for both of them and the rest is going in a savings account for them.

Jennifer:

Put away for college tuition.

Melissa:

I used part of it to buy school uniform pieces for my 4-year-old.

Maia:

Food and school supplies.

These parents are all working hard to provide for their families and raise their kids. They are working a whole lot harder than the CEOs and the hedge fund managers who it looks like, under Build Back Better, may continue to get some of their tax cuts—their tax preference, if you will. It is a lot harder for these workers than the CEOs and the hedge fund managers and the Swiss bank account holders who are always getting tax cuts from politicians in this building.

We all remember what happened. We can look down the hall. We have done

that before and seen the lobbyists line up in front of Leader MCCONNELL's office and line up in front of the politicians who always do their bidding with their tax cuts for the wealthy and for corporations that outsource jobs. You know what they told us 4 years ago, when those tax cuts for the rich passed. They said: It is going to trickle down and help everybody else. We will hire more people, raise wages.

Of course, corporations didn't spend the money to raise wages. Of course, they didn't spend the money to lower prices. And then they blame everybody else for inflation. Of course, they spent it—no surprise here—with stock buybacks, and they are still at it today.

This year, without a single vote, not a single vote from Republicans in Congress—twice, every Democrat voting for it, a 51-to-50 vote—twice we passed the child tax credit. It is a simple contrast: Whose side are you on? Do you want tax cuts for billionaires and corporations or tax cuts for working families?

We want tax cuts for working families, Americans from all over the country, from all kinds of backgrounds. Let's deliver that for them. Let's keep the largest tax cut for working families ever so that parents can have that peace of mind, can relieve some of their anxiety they face every month to pay the rent and pay the bills. They can have the peace of mind that the child tax credit will keep delivering money in their pockets through the holidays this year, into next year, into next year's holiday.

I yield the floor to Senator BOOKER.

Mr. BOOKER. It is frustrating, I know, to see such an incredible action taken, where we have made a difference, where the child tax credit already has had a significant impact. The Columbia Center on Poverty found that the October payment of the expanded child tax credit helped ensure 3.6 million American children—3.6 million American children—are no longer living below the poverty line.

What does that mean? When a child is raised above the poverty line, their horizons are transformed. It actually saves an incredible amount of taxpayer dollars. For every dollar we spend bringing a child above the poverty line, we return \$7 back to our economy.

But it is deeper than that. There is a moral urgency. Children below the poverty line have so many more challenges. Their horizons are constrained, their life outcomes are lessened.

Above the poverty line, our children start to exhibit their genius. Children raised above the poverty line have higher lifetime earnings. They have lower medical costs. Children above the poverty line are less likely to go to the hospital, less likely to get in trouble with the police. Children above the poverty line have less inhibitions with their contributions to this country.

I, too, like my dear friend Senator BROWN, have heard lots from people in

my State about what this little bit of money in their bank accounts—how that little bit of investment makes a transformation in the lives of those families.

Take Kelly in Pitman, NJ. She was forced to quit her job when her children's school and daycare closed due to the pandemic. She hasn't been able to return to work without reliable childcare, and the child tax credit is helping her family. It is helping to make up costs that were lost when she lost her income. It is helping her provide for her children. It is that little bit of help by returning those tax dollars which she has paid in—she is getting more out now—and helping that family.

Take Stacey in Kearny, NJ, the child tax credit payments were a lifeline and helped her and her husband keep their family afloat during this pandemic, during this crisis. She was indefinitely furloughed, and Stacey used those payments to send her two daughters back to preschool.

Well, we know the evidence is in. Sending her two daughters back to preschool means her children will do better in school, are more likely to go to college, have higher lifetime earnings, more success that inures to the benefit of us all in society.

Senator after Senator, on both sides of the aisle, has thousands of these stories about what getting more of their hard-earned tax money back means. In a nation where we have seen the tax cuts of the last decade inure overwhelmingly to the richest of the rich, this was the first tax cut in my lifetime—the biggest of the tax cuts in my lifetime that went overwhelmingly to middle-class families, working-class families, low-income families.

And now it sits on a precipice. As many people are aware, tomorrow is the last day that these payments are scheduled to go out to families like Kelly's and families like Stacy's and millions of families across this country.

The changes we made to the child tax credit will expire. Struggling Americans, working Americans, middle-class Americans will not receive that payment in January, unless this body acts.

To prevent this from happening, to make sure families continue to get more of their tax dollars back and have greater security, hope in challenging times, Congress can pass the Build Back Better Act, which includes the extension of the child tax credit payments, which are lowering costs for American middle-class, working-class, and low-income families.

Now, I know there is concern being raised about the Build Back Better legislation today, but I urge my colleagues to understand the high cost of inaction.

First and foremost, letting this program expire will raise costs for families at the very worst time. With the cost of gas and groceries going up, a tax increase, which is effectively what

this would be, would mean millions of families in difficult times would have it be harder to make ends meet, to make those kitchen table economics work out.

It will add burdens to people at a time we should be lifting them, at a time that we should be providing relief. And, again, it is not just working-class families, middle-class families. It is children living in that moral obscenity, that dark place within our society that is termed "child poverty".

The cost of inaction for all of those children, the cost to our society overall of having children grow up in poverty is \$1.1 trillion—\$1.1 trillion. That is what poverty costs.

But there is a moral cost that is greater than that. There is a moral obscenity that we are experiencing right now, a stain on the soul of our Nation that we have without this tax credit—the highest child poverty rates of all of our industrial peers.

This is a moral moment in America. Our inaction will plunge our Nation back with millions of families facing crisis. We have seen this body act in difficult times before. We have seen us invest in people. We have seen us stand up for children. My worry now is that tomorrow will be the last day, unless we stand up and act.

I join my colleagues Senator BROWN, Senator BENNET, and I join my colleagues Senator KAINE, Senator WARNOCK in calling us to meet this moment, to meet the moral urgency of now, and to please make sure that before this body leaves for the holidays, that for those families who are in stress and economic strain, those families who are worrying about what will happen next month, that we show them that we care, that we show them that we are fiscally prudent, and we make the best investment possible in America. It is not a stock or a bond. The best investment we can make is making sure the child tax credit continues because it is an investment in our children.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Madam President, I am honored to join my colleagues today to speak about the child tax credit and to do something similar to what they have done and just make it personal to families.

Tomorrow, on the 15th of December, more than 930,000 Virginia families, who together have 1.6 million kids, will receive a child tax cut payment—\$300 for a child under age 6 and \$250 for each child between ages 6 and 17. Those are big numbers. Those are big numbers—1.6 million children; 930,000 families.

And I am here joining my colleagues to ask that this payment to parents—this parents' tax cut—to help their children is not the last, because unless we act, the sixth payment that will go out tomorrow will be the last.

Now, the numbers are big, but sometimes the numbers can obscure—data

and statistics can obscure—what is really at stake. So just a week ago, I put up on my Senate web page a question: What has this tax cut meant to your family?

In 1 week we have received more than 200 responses, and I just want to share a few with you.

Heather, from Glenn Allen, is a full-time caretaker of her physically disabled daughter. Her daughter started having trouble with the stairs in her home. So they used the child tax cut payment to help them buy a new stair lift so her daughter is still able to navigate the home.

Heather wrote this to me:

My family deeply appreciates the child tax credit because we routinely incur additional expenses while caring for a loved one with a disability. I take care of our daughter full time, which makes us a one-income household, so the tax credit helped make a difference.

Beatrice from Rockingham, in the Shenandoah Valley, works at Cooks Creek Presbyterian Church, and she sees how the child tax cuts have affected families they work with. One mother of six, whose husband is incarcerated, relies on the payments to help with her child's medical expenses. Another couple that comes to this church, who are in their sixties, are raising their great-nephew because his mother suffers from addiction. The tax cut is helping them cover necessities for this great-nephew.

Lawanda—I have a picture of Lawanda and her family. She is a single mom from South Boston, down on the North Carolina border. Lawanda sent me this picture and said: Use this picture. She used the payments to help buy clothes and shoes for her children and to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, which they usually can't afford.

I love this picture because this is a picture of people with smiles. These are resilient people, who dream of a better future, and this child tax cut is helping them achieve at something as simple as being able to buy fresh vegetables rather than canned, or shoes. Something as simple as that is what this child tax cut is about.

A Virginian from Lynchburg wrote that the tax cut has helped buy healthy food, clothing, and shoes. And then she said this:

Children grow so fast now and eat more, which causes many trips to the grocery store. We are senior citizen, retired grandparents with legal guardianship of our granddaughter. With this being the last payment in December, which would be used partly for Christmas gifts for her, we will [really] have to stretch this.

Grandparents—grandparents raising their granddaughter and finding in this tax cut the ability to afford Christmas gifts.

Nicole from Leesburg is using the tax cut for therapy for her autistic son because insurance no longer covers it.

In another picture is Sasha from Midlothian, which is right outside of Richmond. Sasha wrote to me and said this—and this is Sasha and her young one:

My husband and I both have secure jobs, but the cost of full-time infant care is very high. We spend 23 percent of our combined monthly income on daycare for one child—our 1-year-old son. We also just paid off my student loans and are saving to buy our first house next year. The child tax credit has allowed us to save more money for that house and to pay off debts. We would like to grow our family but worry about our financial burden.

She also wrote:

Thank you for working so hard to pass the Build Back Better bill. I am following it closely because it means so much to my family's future.

From Alexandria, a constituent wrote:

Before the pandemic, the high price of childcare made it difficult to balance my family's budget. Each month we went into debt a little bit more. My husband is a full-time student, and I am the sole breadwinner.

The child tax credit helped them start to pay down debt, to begin an emergency fund, and to start a college fund for their son.

A resident from Waynesboro:

I benefited tremendously with the child tax credit. I am a single parent in every aspect, raising two growing boys. It has helped me out with getting things they need for the school year. Also I saved some to be able to give them a good Christmas.

Finally, Laquanda from Roanoke—all she said was this:

Please fight for us. Please fight for us.

I could go on for a long time with these messages, as could my colleagues, but I will stop there. I have read you stories from people who live in every region of Virginia.

I want to thank my colleagues Senators BENNET, BROWN, BOOKER, WARNOCK, CORTEZ MASTO, and others for leading the charge on getting this policy into the American Rescue Plan earlier this year, and I want to thank all of my Democratic colleagues because this thing passed by one vote in March. If any of us had been absent, if any of us had lost our last race, the American Rescue Plan would have failed, and none of these families would have received the support of the child tax credit.

Well, we are going to have that opportunity again, and, given the fact that one party has said they will not support this bill, it is on our shoulders. These families who are struggling and working so hard and who have hopes as high as any of our hopes, they need us. As Laquanda said, they need us to fight for them.

Thank you to my colleagues for joining in that.

With that, I yield the floor but would defer to my colleague from Colorado.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Madam President, it is a wonderful moment to be here with my colleagues to acknowledge that in March we passed the biggest reduction in poverty in generations in our country. That was through the expansion of the child tax credit, which increased the credit, made it payable on a

monthly basis, and, for the first time in American history, made it fully refundable so the millions of children in this country who were too poor to get the benefit of the credit because their families were too poor would get the benefit of that credit. And we needed to do it.

The United States, before we passed this, was 38th out of 41 industrialized countries in the world when it came to childhood poverty. The poorest generation in this country are our children, and I think what we said was that there is no reason for us to accept those outcomes or those numbers as a permanent feature of our economy or our democracy. And in the end, this isn't about numbers. This is about children all over our country and the future of the United States of America.

Childhood poverty costs this country a trillion dollars a year, and one of the things we decided was that maybe, instead of paying for the effects of childhood poverty, we could actually begin to try to reduce the amount of childhood poverty that exists in our country, the way other countries around the world have already done it.

Nationally, the child tax credit, as I say, is cutting childhood poverty in half. It is reducing hunger among families by a quarter. Let that linger for a second.

When was the last time we were able to come to the floor of the Senate and say we cut hunger in this country by a quarter? It has been generations since anybody has been able to say that on this floor.

In Colorado, a million kids and their families are benefitting from this credit. That is 90 percent of the kids in my State. It is 90 percent of the kids across the country. Parents in Colorado are getting an average of \$240 a month to pay for groceries, to help with the rent, and, really importantly, to pay for a little extra childcare so people can stay at work. And I know that because of what parents have told me they are spending the money on.

When we first passed this credit back in June—I think it was then that it first went into effect—July and August, people were getting ready to go back to school, and I had mom after mom after mom across the State tell me how important it was that they were able to buy school clothes for their kids without bankrupting their family, for the first time.

And, you know, all of this is the reflection of an economy that for 50 years has worked extremely well for the top 10 percent of Americans and hasn't really worked for anybody else, and where the families who come to see me in my townhall say: MICHAEL, we are working really hard, but no matter what we do, we can't afford some combination of housing, healthcare, higher education, early childhood education, if we can even find early childhood education or daycare.

We can't save. We feel like our families are going to live a more diminished

life than we did and that our kids will as well.

So I brought a few photos today to the floor to share some stories of Coloradans with all of you and my colleagues.

This is April Pratt from El Paso County, and she lives there with her three daughters, who are ages 8, 2½, and 1½.

When April was pregnant with her youngest daughter, her husband tragically passed away. Now, she is the sole breadwinner for the family. And although she works full-time at the local school, there is not much left after her mortgage, diapers, and groceries for three young kids. Let me just say that again. She works full-time.

Before the Child Tax Credit, April said she “felt like I was having a lot of anxiety every month about whether I was going to be able to afford my bills. It was eating up a lot of my attention.”

Thanks to the child tax credit, April can afford the \$1,200 a month for childcare for her two youngest daughters so she can work—so she can work. She said, “If I wasn't able to afford childcare, I'd have to quit my job.”

Without the child tax credit, April said that she would be “forced to use my credit card to fill in the gaps, and that debt just accumulates and accumulates, and that becomes crippling, and my family wouldn't be able to get ahead.” She said it was “nice that our government is finally doing something to help working families and middle-class families.”

Finally, after we have cut taxes for the wealthiest people in this country by more than \$5 trillion since 2001, we finally have a tax cut for working families. We should be making it permanent.

This is Amberly Atencio, also from Colorado. She is here with her three girls that are ages 9, 12, and 14. When I got to this place, my daughters were 9, 7, and 4, so I have some appreciation for what she has got on her hands.

They lived their entire lives in Monte Vista, a small town in southwest Colorado in the San Luis Valley. And for the past 3 years, Amberly has been working full-time and studying. And last week, she graduated with her second associate's degree.

She works for a local health insurance company. And before the child tax credit, her paycheck was the only source of income for her family. She said that knowing that monthly support comes on the same day each month helps her pay the rent and buy food. She said: “I'm a single parent. This is like heaven to me, knowing that I have that extra income to provide for my children. . . . It has helped so much.”

Her daughters love sports—soccer, basketball, volleyball, and track. But between the shorts, knee pads, cleats, shin guards, and fees, it all adds up. And with the child tax credit, she has bought that equipment for her daughters so they can play sports with their

friends, which means the world to them.

I had a mom who told me that she had bought a bike for her son and he was able to take it to stay at school late to engage in afterschool activities he otherwise wouldn't be able to do without that bike.

And, finally, here is Ayesha Bogart from Colorado Springs. Here is another mom from the Springs with her three kids, aged 12, 13, and 23. Ayesha served for 16 years as a medic in the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Reserves. While she was on Active Duty, she was injured during a training accident when her Humvee rolled over, and it left her with a traumatic brain injury. Now, she is a single mom supporting three kids all by herself. And before the child tax credit, she couldn't afford to buy new shoes for her kids.

She said there were days when they didn't have shampoo at home and her kids would get teased at school. Thanks to the child tax credit, she bought her kids new pairs of shoes. She bought them school supplies so they feel like they are on a level playing field with the other children in their school. She said the child tax credit has given her “breathing room where there wasn't any before.”

I have heard stories like that all across the State of Colorado. This is not an anecdotal reflection of people not working hard. All of these people are working hard. It is hard work just to raise a child, much less do the kind of jobs these folks are doing. And the economy has worked really well for the top 10 percent, as I said, but hasn't really worked for anybody else.

And what has Washington's response been time and time and time again? To come here and cut taxes for the richest people in America and ignore the needs of working people. That is what we have done since 2001, \$8 trillion in tax cuts, almost all of which have gone to the wealthiest people in this country.

And now, we have a tax cut for working people in an economy that has not lifted them up the way it has lifted the people at the very top. We are saying we don't have to accept childhood poverty as a permanent feature of our economy or our democracy. We don't have to accept an economy where it only grows for the wealthiest Americans. We don't have to accept that Congress is only paying attention to special interests and to the wealthiest Americans.

We can build an economy that includes everybody, that when it grows, everybody benefits from it because the whole society benefits from this as well. Childhood poverty costs this country \$1 trillion a year. We can't afford not to do it, which is why so many other countries in the world have done this.

We can create opportunity for every American family and give every child a chance to contribute to this economy and to our society. And I believe it is fundamentally important to strengthening our democracy, making sure we

have got something we are proud of to turn over to the next generation of Americans.

That is why it is critical for us to extend this child tax credit, to not allow it to lapse at the end of the year, and in my mind, make it permanent. I would argue that we cannot afford not to.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Mr. President, like all Americans, Nevadans have been through a difficult 2 years. Our State was one of the hardest hit by the pandemic. Nevada relies on tourism and the travel industry, and with the country in lockdown, a huge proportion of our families saw layoffs or furloughs. In fact, we had one of the highest unemployment rates in the country at one time: 30 percent.

For those families, the middle-class tax cuts we passed in the American Rescue Plan have been an incredible lifeline. Today, I am joining my colleagues to stand up for extending these tax cuts. It is so important that we get this done for people not only in the Silver State but across the country.

In many cases, this is money that Nevadans have earned, and it really needs to go back into their pockets. We are talking about a tax cut that benefits the vast majority of families in Nevada.

In July of this year, because of the American Rescue Plan, the child tax credit increased to \$300 per month for children under 6 years of age and \$250 a month for children between 6 and 17 years of age. Working families with two young kids are receiving more than \$500 a month back from the government to help them make ends meet, and it is making a tremendous difference. Over 594,000 children in Nevada and their families qualify for this money.

I have heard story after story from people in the Silver State about the way the money is supporting their children. Some families are using the money for rent, to make sure that their kids don't suffer from housing insecurity. Others use it for clothes for their children or schoolbooks and other school supplies.

Lori Munoz from Henderson, NV, told the Las Vegas Sun that she uses it for school lunches and other school expenses. She said, "You always think, 'oh, it's some extra money.' It's never extra money. . . . Kids always need, there's always something that needs to be bought."

Many families use it just for food on the table. After those first payments were issued in July, the number of adults reporting that children in their households didn't have enough to eat fell by one-third.

And Jessie Cartinella from Reno told me that receiving the monthly payments let her stay afloat as a single mom on a teacher's salary and kept her from running up credit card bills. She

said, and I quote: "Thanks to the Advance Child Tax Credit, I've mostly avoided this and been able to pay bills and even enjoy special outings with my children. The Child Tax Credit encourages my family to make better choices in general—affording me assistance with quality childcare, options for healthier products and food, and providing the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities that I believe are critical to a kid's social and physical development."

That was Jessie. And that is why it was so beneficial to her family and her children.

Social interactions are so important for kids' mental health as well, and we have known that throughout this pandemic. Treanna James, a single mom in Las Vegas, used her extra funds to take her two sons to visit an uncle and an aunt in northern California for the first time since the pandemic began. Because of underlying medical issues, they had to be very careful about travel; but she said the child tax credit helped make it possible for them to spend time with family again at Thanksgiving.

So these tax cuts have really been key for Nevada families. Now, they are set to expire at the end of 2021, but the budget proposal that we are considering extends them for 1 more year.

Our hard-working families want us to keep this critical support going to them. This is not the time to make it harder for people to keep a roof over their heads or give their kids the essentials they need.

So let's make sure Nevadans can keep that money that they have earned and extend these middle-class tax cuts to Nevadans and all families across the country. Let's support the working people. Let's support hard-working individuals every day and help them with their economic recovery.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, 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.

Ms. 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.

The majority leader.

VOTE ON S.J. RES. 33

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that all remaining time be yielded back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The joint resolution was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS).

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 49, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 498 Leg.]

YEAS—50

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|
| Baldwin | Hickenlooper | Reed |
| Bennet | Hirono | Rosen |
| Blumenthal | Kaine | Sanders |
| Booker | Kelly | Schatz |
| Brown | King | Schumer |
| Cantwell | Klobuchar | Shaheen |
| Cardin | Leahy | Sinema |
| Carper | Lujan | Smith |
| Casey | Manchin | Stabenow |
| Coons | Markey | Tester |
| Cortez Masto | Menendez | Van Hollen |
| Duckworth | Merkley | Warner |
| Durbin | Murphy | Warnock |
| Feinstein | Murray | Warren |
| Gillibrand | Ossoff | Whitehouse |
| Hassan | Padilla | Wyden |
| Heinrich | Peters | |

NAYS—49

| | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| Barrasso | Graham | Risch |
| Blackburn | Grassley | Romney |
| Blunt | Hagerty | Rounds |
| Boozman | Hawley | Rubio |
| Braun | Hoeven | Sasse |
| Burr | Hyde-Smith | Scott (FL) |
| Capito | Inhofe | Scott (SC) |
| Cassidy | Johnson | Shelby |
| Collins | Kennedy | Sullivan |
| Cornyn | Lankford | Thune |
| Cotton | Lee | Tillis |
| Cramer | Marshall | Toomey |
| Crapo | McConnell | Tuberville |
| Cruz | Moran | Wicker |
| Daines | Murkowski | Young |
| Ernst | Paul | |
| Fischer | Portman | |

NOT VOTING—1

Lummis

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 33) was passed, as follows:

S.J. RES. 33

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the limitation under section 3101(b) of title 31, United States Code, as most recently increased by Public Law 117-50 (31 U.S.C. 3101 note), is increased by \$2,500,000,000,000.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session and consider the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 476, David A. Honey, of Virginia, to be Deputy Under Secretary of Defense; that the nomination be confirmed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; and that the Senate resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). Is there objection?

The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, I object.

It is now December. It has been nearly four months since the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Thirteen servicemembers lost their lives in the attack on Abbey Gate along with hundreds of civilians. As a result of the botched evacuation operation, hundreds, if not thousands, of American civilians were left behind to the enemy.

We hear from our friends on the other side of the aisle that my insistence that we actually vote on nominees is unprecedented. I would humbly suggest that the crisis into which this President has led this country is unprecedented. In my lifetime, it is unprecedented.

It is unprecedented for an American President to watch 13 servicemembers lose their lives in an evacuation for which he is responsible and then to celebrate that operation as “an unqualified success” or “an extraordinary success.” I believe those were President Biden’s words.

Really, an extraordinary success? Thirteen servicemembers dead, hundreds of civilians dead, hundreds of Americans left behind to the enemy—that is success? No, that is a failure. That is unacceptable.

And who has been held accountable for this disaster? No one. Who has the President fired? Who has offered their resignation? Which of the planners at the Department of State or the Department of Defense or the National Security Council has been relieved of duty? No one.

Until there is accountability, I am going to ask that the Senate do the simple task of its job, which is to actually vote on these nominees. The least we could do is observe regular order and vote on these leadership positions at the Department of State and at the Department of Defense.

My colleagues say that we have got to put national security first. I agree with them about that. But I believe that begins at the top, with the President of the United States and the leadership of the Department of Defense and the Department of State. I, for one, am not going to stand by and look the other way while this administration systematically endangers our national security, imperils the American people, and watches the sacrifice of our soldiers go by without any accountability, without any change in direction.

I am not willing to look the other way and just pretend that Afghanistan didn’t happen, which seems to be the posture that many in this body have adopted. I am not willing to do that. I can’t do that because I promised the parents of the fallen that I wouldn’t do that.

I am going to discharge my responsibility. And as long as it takes, I will continue to draw attention to what happened at Abbey Gate and to demand accountability for the disaster that this administration has pushed upon this country and upon the people of my State.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering is a critical position that helps lead and manage our military’s science and technology work. This includes work on disruptive, cutting-edge technologies like quantum science, hypersonics, and artificial intelligence. Maintaining our competitive edge over China in these areas has been a focus of the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, which I chair, and I know that all of us—all of us—here understand how important it is.

We worked on a bipartisan basis to include investment and policy changes for these priorities in the NDAA that we are hoping to pass this week. The Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering is tasked with carrying out many of these changes. Yet the nominee for this post has yet to be confirmed.

Dr. David A. Honey is qualified. He brings decades of experience, including as an Air Force pilot, an intelligence officer, and in leadership roles at DARPA, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and within the intelligence community. Reflecting his qualifications, Dr. Honey’s nomination has bipartisan support and was voice-voted out of the Senate Armed Services Committee in October.

At a time when our adversaries are investing heavily in an attempt to outpace the United States, we need all hands on deck and confirmed leadership in this post, so I am very disappointed that we could not do that today. This is a matter of national security.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

INFLATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, for months now, American families have struggled with the growing burden of inflation. New data shows just how bad things have gotten.

Last month, consumer prices increased at the fastest pace in 40 years. Now, I would like to take a little walk down memory lane. The last time the American people endured price spikes like this, “Eye of the Tiger” was one of the top songs on the radio. I am sure the Senator from Delaware remembers that very well. The world had yet to be introduced to Nintendo and Mario. Consumers were anxiously awaiting the release of the first cell phone, which weighed in at a whopping 2 pounds. I remember those unwieldy telephones well.

Over the last four decades, of course, a lot has changed, and I am not just talking about technology—the attacks of September 11, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the great recession.

Even during the first year of the pandemic, inflation didn’t come close to hitting the heights that it has today. Between March 2020 and February 2021,

the inflation rate never topped 2 percent.

There were countless reasons for us to be optimistic. We had three highly effective vaccines, with shots going into the arms of millions of people every day. Schools were reopening. Employees were returning to work. The American people began to discover a new semblance of normal post-COVID.

But the administration ignored all of this progress because they had another plan in mind. They seized on what one House Democrat described as a “tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit [their] vision.” They crafted a nearly \$2 trillion piece of legislation that included their ideological priorities and tried to brand it as necessary pandemic relief. But we know that only about 10 percent of that \$2 trillion expenditure went to COVID-19. Less than 1 percent went for vaccines. What it did include was backdoor funding for Planned Parenthood, a blank check for mismanaged union pension plans, and money for climate justice. It was easy to see through the COVID relief facade.

Well, as our colleagues pushed this bill forward, they ignored warning signs from leading economists that this kind of spending chasing limited goods and services could trigger inflation. Larry Summers, who served as Secretary of Treasury during the Obama administration, even predicted that this package could “set off inflationary pressures of a kind we have not seen in a generation.”

Our colleagues couldn’t be convinced to change course, and look where we are now as a result. We are experiencing inflation of a kind that we have not seen in a generation. Last month, prices jumped a whopping 6.8 percent from the previous year, marking the sixth consecutive month in which inflation has topped 5 percent.

When concerns were raised about this, the Federal Reserve claimed that this inflation was transitory—in other words, it was a passing moment—but the longer and longer inflation continues to rise and continues to be a problem, it is looking less and less transitory and more and more frightening. The reason it is frightening, of course, is because particularly people on fixed incomes are seeing less and less buying power for each dollar they spend. It is, some have said, a hidden tax on the American people, which describes its impact very well.

Well, month after month, the data has now demonstrated that this is not just transitory and it isn’t just a blip on the radar of our economy. Inflation is running much hotter than expected, and things are not expected to cool down anytime soon.

As families prepare for the Christmas holiday season, they are bracing their wallets for higher than normal expenses, and one of the biggest hits is for grocery bills—hardly something optional. Breakfast on Christmas morning is sure to cost a lot more than it

did just a year ago. Egg prices are up 8 percent. Bacon costs a whopping 21 percent more than it did just a year ago. Dinner—it won't be any cheaper either. Prices are up for everything from ham to salad dressing to pie.

Cooking that meal will cost you a lot more too. Electricity prices are up 6.5 percent, and anyone cooking on a gas range will shell out 25 percent more than they did last year.

If you are traveling to see your extended family this year, you better start saving for it now. Gas prices are up a whopping 58 percent, the largest increase since 1980.

Of course, this ignores the rising cost of gifts sitting under the Christmas tree, if you can get them because of broken and delayed supply chains. So the new cars and the washing machines and sofas that countless families have purchased this year, all of those cost more.

You would think that our Democratic colleagues who are proposing another \$5 trillion in spending under the so-called BBB—or Build Back Better bill—you would think they would view this with caution and back off of their plans or at least tap the brakes for a second round of unnecessary spending. Unfortunately, that does not appear to be the case. In fact, the Senate majority leader, Senator SCHUMER, is trying to double down on this next round of inflationary spending.

We know that every trick in the book has been employed to try to make the BBB, the Build Back Better—“Build Back Broke,” “Build Back Bad,” “Build Back Bankrupt,” you call it what you will—our Democratic colleagues have used every gimmick in the book to make the price of this bill look as small as possible. Of course, they started with the chairman of the Budget Committee. Senator SANDERS wanted to spend \$6 trillion more. That was pared down to \$3.5 trillion. Now, they claim it is only \$1.75 trillion. In order to achieve that number, they have gamed the Tax Code to fund part of the bill while handing out tax breaks to millionaires and billionaires in relief for State and local taxes. They have strategically chosen start dates, sunsets, and expiration dates that make these programs appear deceptively to cost less.

One of our colleagues acknowledged that this is disingenuous advertising and even told Mr. GRAHAM, the Senator from South Carolina, that he knew that this score they were promoting was full of gimmicks.

Of course, that is a lot different than the President himself, who said this bill will cost zero. Now, everybody knows that is not true.

But there had been some debate about what the honest score would be even with all the gimmicks. If the temporary provisions were extended, as we all know they would be—there is no such thing as a temporary government program around here or, as Ronald Reagan said, the closest thing to eter-

nal life is a temporary government program—this legislation will cost a lot more than they admit, and we now know how much that will be.

Senator GRAHAM, who serves as a ranking member on the Budget Committee, asked the Congressional Budget Office to provide a more accurate cost estimate for this legislation. Others like me asked the CBO and the Joint Committee on Taxation to give us an updated estimate. There have been a lot of requests made to come up with an accurate, truth-in-advertising score for this huge bill.

Last week, we got what we asked for. We finally received the true score for this legislation, and it is a whole lot more than the American people were told and much more than they have bargained for. Let's start with the cost provision of just one part of this bill, the expanded child tax credit. This expansion initially came on the scene as a temporary measure in the first partisan spending bill just 9 months ago. So this actually builds on the \$2 trillion our colleagues passed at the beginning of this year. The very first payments had barely gone out the door when our friends on the other side of the aisle called for these temporary provisions to be made permanent. Our colleagues knew that a permanent expansion would have been far too expensive so they opted for a temporary extension.

Earlier drafts of this bill would have extended this policy through 2025. As time went on, the pricetag was still too high so Democrats scaled it back to a 1-year extension, but still nothing has changed. Calls to make this temporary provision permanent have not gone away, and I see no indication that our colleagues will ever be content to let this extension expire after just 1 year.

Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle say this provision will cost taxpayers \$185 billion, as if that were a bargain. The latest estimate from the CBO places the actual cost at roughly \$1.6 trillion. You heard that right. Our colleagues across the aisle said it would just cost \$185 billion, but the latest estimate from the Congressional Budget Office placed the actual cost during the 10-year budget window at roughly \$1.6 trillion, nine times higher than what Democrats have been telling the American people. The true cost of this one provision is nearly as high as what our colleagues said the entire package would cost.

Then you add in the other higher-than-promised expenses. The true costs of payoffs and subsidies to organize labor, allowing dues to become tax deductible will cost taxpayers billions more than advertised.

But I will give them credit about one thing. They are transparent when it comes to subsidizing more frivolous lawsuits against small businesses by giving a permanent tax cut to trial lawyers. When you add up all the not-so-temporary provisions, the Congressional Budget Office says this bill will

cost \$4.9 trillion during the first 10 years—not \$1.75 trillion, not zero, but \$4.9 trillion. Deficits and debt would increase by a staggering \$3 trillion; in other words, borrowed money that the next generation or maybe next two generations will have to repay, which makes President Biden's comment about “zero” even more bizarre.

When it comes to solving our country's biggest problems, our colleagues across the aisle have proven themselves to be a one-trick pony. Whether the American people are facing a pandemic, a sluggish economic recovery, red-hot inflation, or any combination of crises, President Biden and our Democratic colleagues here in Congress think trillions of dollars in new spending is the best path forward.

The first round of reckless spending hurt our economic recovery and sent the American people on a wild inflationary ride. Our colleagues continue to ignore clear signals from the economy, including warnings by Democratic economists about the consequences to unchecked spending.

And we are now experiencing the highest inflation in a generation. This second round of spending would usher in more inflation, higher deficits, and even greater financial trouble for the American people. The American people have clearly suffered enough, and it is time to simply put the “Build Back Bankrupt” bill out of its misery.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CRAMER. 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. CRAMER. Mr. President, as we approach the Christmas break and the advent of the new year, I believe it is instructive to take an inventory of the year that was. So in honor of the holiday season, let's take stock of the first year of the reign of Biden, SCHUMER, and PELOSI. In fact, in the spirit of the season, I am going to call this recitation the “Twelve Biden Blunders of Christmas.”

The first blunder that Joe Biden gave to us is a free Big Government socialist agenda, otherwise known as the Democrats' Build Back Better plan, designed to pass with no support from or, frankly, input from any of these pesky Republicans.

Time and time again, Joe Biden and his Democratic toymakers have parroted the claim that their Big Government socialist agenda costs zero—zero. Can you imagine a piece of legislation designed to give away trillions of dollars but doesn't cost anything? But perhaps they have some elf dust that makes it possible.

Obviously, this isn't true. Analysis by nongovernment, nonpartisan

groups, including the Penn Wharton model and the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, did an analysis and concluded that the cost was much, much higher, like just under \$5 trillion. A recent thorough analysis, based on the history and the traditions of Congress and spending, by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office agrees. The Washington Post's Fact Checker even gave Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen two Pinocchios when she repeated the same bogus claim that this bill would cost nothing.

The second blunder Joe Biden gave to us is hiding from media reporters and not taking questions. It is unbelievable to me—it is hard to imagine the leader of the freest country in the world, in fact, the leader of the free world, is afraid to take questions from the fourth estate or that his staffers are afraid of what might come out of his mouth.

Freedom of the press is enshrined in the First Amendment of our Constitution on purpose. Yet on David Axelrod's podcast, the White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki admitted out loud that "a lot of times we say, 'Don't take questions.'"

The media in the United States is not supposed to be the mouthpiece of the government or its leaders. Transparency is essential—essential—in our exceptional self-governing system.

Now, I am not the President of the United States, but reporters who work in the halls of this temple of liberty and, of course, reporters back home in North Dakota know I am always willing to engage. I don't hide from my votes or explanations for them. I am not scripted to the point of resigning my own thoughts or opinions or even mistakes and decisions. North Dakotans elected me, not my staff. Americans elected Joe Biden, not his staff, not some buffer of bureaucracy. He has the responsibility to be accessible, and the media has the responsibility to demand it of him.

But the slippery slope doesn't end here. Another third blunder Joe Biden gave to us is the White House deciding what is "misinformation." In a news conference, Jen Psaki said:

We're flagging—

Imagine this now, the White House spokesperson:

We're flagging problematic posts for Facebook that spread disinformation. We're working with doctors and medical experts . . . who are popular with their audience with accurate information. So, we're helping get trusted content out there.

That is frightening language coming from a spokesperson for the President. It sounds an awful lot like the U.S. Government colluding with the media to decide what, in fact, counts as fact. In fact, reading between the lines on this one, it seems the White House is playing the ultimate arbiter of the truth. If this seems a little Orwellian, well, it is. It is.

While it is easy to see why Ms. Psaki might conclude—and, frankly, other

Democrats—that they, in fact, control a "state media," the fact is, they don't. Give the American people some credit here. They are smarter than being spoon-fed information from the West Wing through their "elfin folk" at Facebook.

The fourth blunder Joe Biden gave to us is raging inflation from pumping trillions of free dollars into the economy. We all saw the writing on the wall when Democrats and the Biden administration pushed for \$2 trillion in "COVID relief" in March, just 3 months removed from the bipartisan \$900 billion relief bill. This was a total partisan, reckless \$2 trillion that came at a time when there was obvious economic recovery coming out of the pandemic.

And now, Democrats want to spend nearly \$5 trillion on their "Build Back Broke" plan. To put these massive numbers in perspective, the sum of these two bills—just these two bills—is more than the U.S. Government spent fighting World War II. In 2019 dollars, the United States spent \$4.69 trillion over the course of just under 4 years to fight and defeat Nazi Germany and the Axis powers.

Liberal and left-of-center economists, including Larry Summers and Jason Furman, sounded warning bells early this year, but Democrats forged ahead sending inflation to levels not seen in nearly 40 years. They continue to insist that inflation is "transitory," but Americans know better. Americans paying more and more for everything with each passing month know that this is more than transitory inflation.

The fifth blunder Joe Biden's Cabinet gave to us is Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas's assessment of the southern border crisis. Remember the hordes of illegal immigrants camping out on the bridge in Del Rio, TX? "Don't worry," Secretary Mayorkas said as he low-balled the numbers, citing:

Approximately, I think it's about 10,000 or so, 12,000. It could be even higher.

Actually, conservative estimates have the tally upward of 15,000 people.

While we are talking about the crisis at the southern border, it is important to note Joe Biden made multiple claims that he visited the border. But guess what. He hasn't. The Washington Post Fact Checker wrote: "We cannot find evidence that Biden at one point made a visit to the southern border" in his many decades of public office.

It is as though he thinks, if he says it, somehow that makes it true. The problem is lying doesn't make the lie true. I have been to the border, most recently, about 6 weeks ago. I can tell you, it is bad. I can tell you, it is a crisis. Our Customs and Border Patrol agents are completely overwhelmed. I went on a ride-along and aerial tour of the Rio Grande Valley and visited the Donna Processing Facility, where families and unaccompanied minors are processed. If there is any takeaway from seeing this firsthand, it is this:

There is no way to adequately understand the magnitude of the problem or the severity of the crisis unless you see it with your own two eyes. So I implore the President, who has held elected office nearly uninterrupted since 1973, please visit the southern border and acknowledge what is obvious to everybody else. This is a national crisis.

The sixth blunder Joe Biden gave to us is a new kind of border wall, not the wall we need to secure the crisis on the southern border, which has seen record numbers as nearly 2 million people have attempted to enter the country illegally under Biden's watch.

By the way, this is just the number of illegal immigrants who have been apprehended by our CBP heroes. Now, that is more than twice the population of my home State.

But according to Secretary Mayorkas, a border wall is an affront to—get this—an affront to humanitarian relief. Obviously, the ranchers and the innocent American citizens living and working near the border don't qualify for this humanitarian relief. Yet his Agency secured and awarded a contract for nearly half a million taxpayer dollars to build and install a fence around Joe Biden's home in Delaware. What kind of humanitarian relief does Joe Biden's beach mansion need?

The seventh blunder Joe Biden gave to us is \$450,000 settlements for illegal immigrants, just for being illegal. The Wall Street Journal was the first to report this absurd plan. While North Dakota families and businesses are struggling with inflation and skyrocketing costs on everything because of Joe Biden's spending policies, his administration wants to hand out hundreds of thousands of dollars to illegal immigrants.

In comparison to the \$450,000 proposed payout for illegal border crossers, the U.S. Government pays only \$100,000 to the families of soldiers killed in service to our country, and people who are wrongly accused and incarcerated in Federal prison are eligible for just \$50,000. That is right—\$100,000 if you die defending our freedom but \$450,000 if you violate our freedom.

Now, when confronted about this, President Biden said this is not going to happen, but he was quickly corrected by his own White House and the Justice Department. Negotiations are ongoing, so we don't know what any final number will be. I have helped sponsor legislation and amendments to prevent this policy from ever being implemented. The last thing we need is another incentive for people to come to our country illegally.

The eighth blunder Joe Biden gave to us is private jet-setting climate apologist John Kerry's comments on coal. Kerry stated:

By 2030 in the United States, we won't have coal. We will not have coal plants.

While a State Department spokesperson walked back Kerry's statement, "noting the administration's plan still

would allow coal," it is absurd on its face.

Cutting off coal would shut down American innovation, kill all the progress we have made on carbon capture technology, eliminate good-paying U.S. jobs, scrap grid reliability, and increase the cost of energy and everything that is produced that is dependent on the energy—like we need more inflation—and cede energy dominance to foreign adversaries who have a total lack of environmental concern and standards. Canceling coal is merely a transfer of emissions guilt to other countries with dirtier energy production than we have.

The ninth blunder Joe Biden gave to us is moral authority and other gaffes from Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm. Most notably, Secretary Granholm—while in North Dakota, no less—said: "We don't have much moral authority to call out China when it comes to energy production and emissions."

This is not just wrong; it is embarrassing. It is not just an intellectual mistake; it is an embarrassing gaffe. The stringent environmental and, I might add, labor standards of the United States are far superior to the lack of any of them in China. And I rest my case on the facts of the situation here.

One, according to the BBC and several other agencies—but the BBC says China emits 27 percent of global emissions, and it is a rising percentage because it is a rising number, while the United States is around 10 percent and a declining percent.

Two, according to the EPA, total U.S. energy-related carbon emissions fell by 12 percent from 2005 to 2018 while the United States became the No. 1 energy producer in the world.

In contrast, global energy-related carbon emissions increased nearly 24 percent. So the United States reduces 12; the globe increases 24 percent. This is significant by any standard and certainly qualifies us to be able to say we have moral authority over China when it comes to polluting and greenhouse gas emissions.

In North Dakota, in fact, we are performing ground-breaking research and piloting innovative demonstration projects. We are in the process of adding carbon capture technology to facilities like the Milton R. Young and Coal Creek power generation stations.

Furthermore, the United States has invested more in clean energy, research, development, and deployment than the next two countries combined.

We are a global leader in climate mitigation measures for new energy sources, carbon management, and efficiency. The radical and backwards energy policy of this administration ignores American exceptionalism and the real progress that we have made as a nation.

The Chinese Communist Party, Russia, and other polluters have shown no real interest in doing so, yet Secretary

Granholm and Joe Biden provide cover for them, along, of course, with John Kerry, even greenlighting their fossil fuel energy projects, while they kill America's.

The tenth blunder Joe Biden gave to us is a disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. There is a lot to unpack here, and nothing about this topic is meant to be glib or sarcastic. This withdrawal was nothing short of a tragic disaster and an international embarrassment.

We will continue searching for answers and accountability from the administration on this, but let's focus on the failed commitments from Joe Biden. He said his administration would get all Americans and our allies out of the country ahead of his arbitrary August 31 withdrawal deadline.

He also said the United States would stay in Afghanistan until all Americans who want to leave can do so. This is obviously not what happened.

After the botched withdrawal, the administration listed numbers ranging from 85 people to 200 or maybe 400 Americans left in Afghanistan. The State Department, however, believes as many as 14,000 legal permanent U.S. residents remain in Afghanistan, according to a foreign policy press report. Whatever the number, the President went on national television and told the world this withdrawal was "an extraordinary success."

Can you imagine being one of the people left behind and seeing your President on TV calling what he did an extraordinary success, saying that we got out successfully? It is abundantly clear there are significant numbers of U.S. citizens, residents, and important Afghan allies still stranded in the country if, in fact, they are still alive at all.

The 11th blunder Joe Biden gave to us is welcoming stiff competition with China. In October, Jen Psaki was asked about the Chinese Communist Party's hypersonic missile test successfully circumventing the whole globe which, from reports, indicate they are capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. Her response, Oh, we welcome stiff competition.

Really? Really? Why would the White House welcome military competition from our peer adversary communist China?

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, it has been a priority to ensure the U.S. military maintains a secure and effective deterrent, a nuclear deterrent. In order to do so, we need to modernize our nuclear triad. America's nuclear triad of missiles, submarines, and aircraft are 60-plus years old in many cases, and they are not the same strong deterrent to our adversaries that they once were. It is clear and concerning that the Chinese Communist Party is prioritizing a nuclear buildup, and the White House seems comfortable with all of this.

The 12th blunder Joe Biden gave to us is the consistent confusion and

alarm in regards to his own comments about Taiwan.

In October, Joe Biden told reporters, "I have spoken with Xi Jinping about Taiwan. We agree, we will abide by the Taiwan agreement," he said. Of course, immediately, alarm bells rang out, causing confusion and a lot of head scratching. You have to remember, we have a backdrop of Beijing ramping up military pressure on Taiwan, and Joe Biden can't properly articulate our Nation's foreign policy posture.

The lack of understanding on something as critical as China is dumbfounding. Taiwan is a strategic ally and important trading partner to the United States, especially given the increased risk China poses, not only to the region but to the world. If this was an isolated incident, it would be one thing, but this isn't the only time his comments in Taiwan had to be clarified—no. In a CNN townhall, Anderson Cooper interrupted the President to ask if Joe Biden was "saying that the U.S. would come to Taiwan's defense if China attacked?"

Joe Biden promptly responded with, Yes, we have a commitment.

The White House resorted once again to walking back these comments, in what seems to be a recurring occurrence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. One Washington Post article wrote:

Most analysts believe simply that Biden misspoke.

Misspeaking is a kind way to dismiss the obvious lack of clear understanding of a critical foreign policy issue by our Commander in Chief. If there were to be an attack, I am not even sure the President would know what to do if he can't accurately express what our policy is.

I am not sure I can sum this up as succinctly as two turtledoves and a partridge in a pear tree, but I can conclude that Joe Biden and his leftwing extremist allies deserve a lump of carbon-intense coal in their White House stockings this Christmas.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

ANNIVERSARY OF SANDY HOOK SHOOTING

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, 9 years ago this morning, I was in Bridgeport, CT. I had just done an event with the city of Bridgeport, and I was meeting my wife and, at the time, my two very young children, ages 4 and 1, in 2012 at the Bridgeport train station. We were going to take the train down to New York City, and Cathy and I were going to show our two kids the splendor of New York City. We were going to go see the Christmas tree. We were going to go to the ice rink.

And as we were waiting for the train to arrive, I got news that there had been a shooting at a school in Newtown, CT. Newtown is a beautiful community, a quintessential small town, close-knit. The Labor Day parade every year attracts every civic and community group to it, the pride of the community.

And I wondered whether I could still continue on to this family trip or whether I needed to wait to find out more. I figured it was a disgruntled employee. A few moments passed as I waited for the train, and the news began to come in that this was much more grim, that there were children shot, perhaps many.

And I decided that I should get in a car and head to Sandy Hook. There are a lot of days when I wish I didn't see the things that I saw or hear the things that I heard in Newtown that day.

Senator BLUMENTHAL, who is on the floor with me right now, he and I were there, and we were just witnesses. We were just interlopers. Neither of us lost a loved one that day, but it is a day that I will never, ever forget, etched into my brain.

And we come here likely every December 14 to memorialize another year having passed since Sandy Hook. And, of course, at some point, you come to a loss for words. You can't figure out what new to say to your colleagues to try to explain what has happened to these families, to this community, why there is such an aching for action, a disbelief that this country refuses to stand up and do something about the safety of our kids—because, well, Newtown caught the Nation's attention for good reason, twenty 6 and 7-year-olds vanishing from the Earth in an instant. Every single day, there are mothers and fathers who are losing children to gun violence—gun violence that is completely preventable.

A few weeks after Newtown, I was in a community center in the north end of Hartford with parents who were furious that the country was just waking up to this epidemic of gun violence after White children were shot in Newtown because it had been happening to their Black children for decades.

And so, today, I want to do something very simple for my colleagues and for the country, I want to just explain to you what the grief of these families feels like, what it looks like when you lose a child, whether that child is 6 or 7 or 16 or 17. When you outlive your child, when your child doesn't even make it to adulthood, there is an all-consuming grief that is inescapable.

One of the emotions that is connected to this grief that I have learned about is the tendency to deny the reality that has become your surrounding.

That is logical, to momentarily, either purposely or subconsciously, try to figure out a way out of this world that you are living in without your child or without your son or daughter whom you had planned to spend the rest of your life with.

And so I want to talk a little bit about that emotion today. I live now in the South End of Hartford. I live just two blocks from the intersection of South Prospect and Shelby Street. I think I live there intentionally, because I know this story so well, and when my family and I were looking for

a house in Hartford and there was one available just two blocks from this intersection, I think there was probably something intentional about the choice we made.

On and at that intersection, just two months before the Sandy Hook shooting, Shane Oliver, a young African American, 20 years old, was meeting a couple of acquaintances. He was transferring a car that he had fixed up to this other group of individuals whom he knew in passing.

He was there with his girlfriend, and during the exchange of this vehicle, an argument broke out. It started because of something untoward that his sellers said about his girlfriend. It was essentially an argument over a girl that turned into a fistfight that then prompted Luis Rodriguez to go back to his car. Inside that car was an illegal gun. He walked out of the car with a gun. Shane Oliver tried to run, and he was shot in the back. He died that night at a Hartford hospital.

His mother, for a good deal afterward, would wake up in the middle of the night, awaken from a deep sleep, put her clothes on, get into her car, and start driving. She would do this night after night.

She would drive from her home to the corner of South Prospect and Shelby Street, where her son died. And when she got there, she would shift her transmission into park and she would turn on the high beams and just wait for hours—the car in park, the high beams on—ostensibly, waiting for her son to come back. It is impossible. Shane Oliver had died months ago. He wasn't coming back. But his mother, consumed by this grief, consumed by this need to deny what had happened, sat there in her car.

Around the same time, one parent whom both Dick and I have gotten to know very well in Sandy Hook came up with her own trick. She would pretend that her son who had died that day at Sandy Hook wasn't dead. In fact, he was just visiting a friend for the afternoon.

She was trying to figure out ways to just get some housework done, to just tidy up the place, to make some phone calls that she needed to in order to get her family's business done, and the only way that she could do that was to imagine that her son was at a play date and that he would be coming home soon. And, of course, that dream would vanish, and she would once again come to grips with the reality that her son was never, ever coming home. But that need to deny that reality, even for a few hours, was what was necessary for her in order to get through the day.

I just tell those two stories because I want people to understand how desperate your life becomes when you lose a child. We lost 26 individuals—20 kids and 6 educators—9 years ago today in Sandy Hook, and the families of all 26 of these individuals—the parents, the brothers, the sisters, the children—their lives will never, ever be the same.

Newtown will never, ever be the same. Many of these kids lived within a block or two of each other. Everyone in Newtown knew one of these families, two of these families. Half of these kids all went to the same church. The funerals that we went to over and over again were at the same place, with the same priest presiding over funeral after funeral, wake after wake.

And so sometimes those of us who work in and around this issue of gun violence get angry at our colleagues, because how can you listen to these stories of grief—and they happen in every State—and choose not to act?

Lastly, I want to do something that I have done several times on the floor, because I am running out of ways to express what happened in Sandy Hook and why our inaction is inexcusable. I am running out of turns of phrase to do it myself. So maybe the words of a parent will help you understand why we need to act. So I am going to read a few excerpts from testimony that our friend Neil Heslin gave before the U.S. Senate just 2 months after Sandy Hook occurred.

Neil is a complicated guy, a good friend who had hard times in his life. But his best friend was his son Jesse Lewis. And I will end by reading what he wrote to the U.S. Senate 9 years ago.

On December 14, Jesse got up and got ready for school. He was always excited to go to school. I remember on that day we stopped at Misty Vale Deli. It's funny the things you remember. I remember Jesse got the sausage, egg and cheese he always gets, with hot chocolate. And I remember the hug he gave me when I dropped him off. He just held me, and he rubbed my back. I can still feel that hug.

And Jesse said "It's going to be alright."

I mentioned that his father Neil had a rough life. He had a hard time, like a lot of folks.

And Jesse said "It's going to be alright. Everything's going to be okay, Dad." Looking back it makes me wonder. What did he know? Did he have some idea about what was about to happen? But at the time I didn't think much of it. I just thought he was being sweet.

He was always being sweet like that. He was the kind of kid who used to leave me voice messages where he'd sing me happy birthday even when it wasn't my birthday. I'd ask him about it, and he'd say "I just wanted to make you feel happy."

He had so much wisdom. He would know things, and I would have no idea how he knew. But whatever he said, it was always right. He would remember things we'd done and places we'd been that I had completely forgotten about. I used to think of him as a tiny adult.

Other people felt it, too. Teachers would tell me about his laugh, how he made things at school more fun just by being there.

Jesse had this idea that you never leave people hurt. If you can help somebody, you do it.

That's what Jesse thought. If you can make somebody feel better, you do it.

They tell me that's how he died. I guess we still don't know exactly what happened at that school. Maybe we'll never know. But what people tell me is Jesse did something

different. When he heard the shooting, he didn't run and hide. He started yelling. People disagree [about what he said]. . . . [But] ten kids from my son's class made it to safety. I hope to God something Jesse did [that day] helped them survive. . . .

What I know is that Jesse wasn't shot in the back. He took two bullets. The first one grazed the side of his head, but that [probably] didn't stop him yelling. The other hit him in the forehead. Both bullets were fired from the front. That means the last thing my son did was look Adam Lanza straight in the face. . . .

Jesse grew up with guns, just like I did. I started shooting . . . when I was eight years old. My dad was a vice president for years at a local gun club. He started taking me shooting when I was eight. . . . He taught me to respect guns, just like I taught Jesse.

Jesse . . . had an interest in guns. He had a bb gun. I watched over him like a hawk with that. I taught him gun safety. He knew it. He could recite it to you.

Some guns just don't have any place in the hands of civilians. The assault weapons we're talking about today, their sole purpose is to put a lot of lead out in a battlefield quickly. That's what they do. That's what they did at Sandy Hook Elementary.

I wish I wasn't here with you today.

Neil writes:

The best day of my life was the day my son was born. The worst day was the day he died. I don't want to relive that day by talking to you here about it. It would be easier for me just to stay home.

But I know that's not what Jesse would do. Jesse died screaming at a man with a gun. He died yelling at the top of his lungs so maybe some of his classmates could get to safety.

I'm not real political. Half the time I think it doesn't matter which group of you guys runs things out here, no offense. I've always thought it wasn't a real good idea for people to be walking around the streets with military weapons, but I probably wouldn't have said anything about it.

So the reason I say this isn't about politics is because what I felt on that day, and what I've felt since, doesn't have anything to do with politics. In politics, people like to debate and say if we banned the weapon that Adam Lanza used would he just find something else. Let me tell you, when you're sitting at a firehouse and it is one in the morning and you are hoping against hope that your son is still hiding somewhere in that school, you want any change that makes it one bit more likely you'll see your boy again.

Before he died, Jesse and I used to talk about maybe coming to Washington someday. He wanted to go up the Washington monument. When we talked about it last year Jesse asked if we could come and meet the President.

I said earlier that I can be a little cynical about politicians. But Jesse believed in you. He learned about you in school and he believed in you. I want to believe in you, too. I know you can't give me Jesse back. Believe me, if I thought you could I'd be asking you for that. But I want to believe that you will think about what I told you [here] today. I want to believe that you'll think about it and then you'll do something about it, whatever you can do to make sure that no other father has to see what I've seen.

Dick and I were at that firehouse all day and all night, and I will never, ever forget that when all the parents had gone home, having told what happened,

the first responders had almost all left. Sitting in the middle of the firehouse all by himself was this one man. And it was Neil Heslin. I left that firehouse—I can't remember—at 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock at night. And Neal was the last person I talked to. And, as he tells you in his testimony, he didn't leave until 1:30. If there was any chance that Jesse was coming back, that he was running around in the woods, he was going to be sitting there at the firehouse.

It gets harder every year, and I have no personal stake in this. I went home that night to both of my kids, who were sleeping safely in their beds.

What the hell is going on in this country that we sit here and memorialize year after year since those 20 kids died and we don't do anything meaningful about it?

Next December will be 10 years, and I am just going to tell you how hard it will be for so many of these families to live through a 10-year mark of Sandy Hook with no action from this body.

We have a year to get our act together here to make sure that in some small way we can honor these children with action.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PETERS). The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, this day is one of the profound moments for both Senator MURPHY and myself, because we lived through that day—a searing, grief-stricken day that neither of us will ever forget, 9 years ago. And at this moment on that day, I stood before a church full of parents and members of that Newtown community. And what I said then was, "The world is watching. The world is watching us and what we will do."

Today, we remember not only what we lost but also what we still need to do as, 9 years ago, those 20 beautiful children and 6 great educators lost their lives. Today, as we did at St. Rose of Lima Church that evening, we remember the lives they lived. Their names will be forever engraved in our hearts. We remember them for bringing bursts of light and laughter and love into our lives, mostly into the lives of their families.

We also remember the heroism, the real heroism, of those educators on that day—of the six who bravely sought to shield their children. Literally, with their own bodies, they sought to protect their children—running unhesitatingly toward that danger, barricading classrooms, drawing on all their reserves of calm and professionalism to protect the children in their care. They were heroes, and so were emergency responders, State police, and all who came to the firehouse that day. I remember the broken faces—the heartbroken faces—of men who went into the school building to secure the crime scene and saw the bodies of children who could have been their own. They were tough State policemen who had seen it all. Those

emergency responders, the ministers, the priests, the people of faith who tended to the parents, and, yes, indeed, the parents themselves—heroes.

My colleague Senator MURPHY has talked about Jesse's dad, Neil Heslin. Jesse's mom, Scarlett Lewis, became a hero as a champion of social and emotional learning to try to prevent the conflict and the emotional travail that could lead someone like Adam Lanza to do what he did.

I will never forget, at one of those wakes and funerals that we attended in the days afterward—they seemed interminable in the cold and the deadening light of winter—the one mom whom I approached and said: "When the time is right, when you are ready, I think we should do something about gun violence." She looked at me and said: "I am ready now."

The ferocity, the bravery, the strength, and fortitude of those parents in the days and months afterward, coming here, as we sought to do something about gun violence, and then they sat in the Gallery when, by a handful of votes, we failed, and the cry of shame—shame—that one of those parents shouted to us.

They worked bravely, and they have continued that work with the kind of unflinching courage that it takes every time they tell their stories and every time one of the surviving families talks about their children in the quest to save others. That is what it is all about. That is why those brave parents—heroes—of this story have continued.

For them, that December morning began like every other. They took their children to school, kissed them goodbye, maybe admonished them to be good that day. It was a normal day until it wasn't. Then, time stopped for them and for all of us. Time stopped, and the world changed forever—irreparably. Irreparably, it changed forever for them and for all of us. Nine years later, they live with that grief so far more deeply than any of us that it almost feels like an incursion on their privacy to talk about that day. The scars of that day are for them but also for the brothers and sisters. For everyone who suffered a loss, that trauma and grief continue, and they relive it on this day.

There also are heroes in that community of Newtown and Sandy Hook—a beautiful, quintessential New England town, with such great spirit. They came together that evening at the St. Rose of Lima Church and in the days and weeks and years afterward with unyielding conviction and courage.

Yet we know that they are so far from alone because, in that time—incredibly, in the time—of the 9 years since that day, 900,000 more people have perished; 900,000 more people have died from gun violence and so many of them children. One-third of American children live in a home with a gun, and 3 million children are exposed to gun violence every year.

Firearms are the leading cause of death among American children and teenagers—the leading cause of death for children younger than the age of 13. So often, they occur at home—outside the front door, in the neighborhood. Black children and teens are 14 times more likely than White children and teens to die by gun homicide. There is a searing inequity and injustice here that radiates outside the boundaries of Sandy Hook and Newtown. It affects every community. None is immune. None is above gun violence.

Because 60 percent of all deaths by gun violence are suicide, there are solutions here, like safe storage and emergency risk protection orders, and red flag statutes that simply keep guns safely stored, like Ethan's Law, or that separate guns from people who say they are going to kill themselves or others or who give evidence that that is what they are going to do.

The good news is we are seeing a new generation of leaders. We are seeing a political movement, not just a moment but a political movement, and a group of organizations that is mobilizing the vast majority of the American people who know we need to put an end to gun violence: Sandy Hook Promise, Newtown Action Alliance, Connecticut Against Gun Violence, Moms Demand Action, Students Demand Action, Giffords, Brady, March for Our Lives—in the wake of Parkland, March for Our Lives. This is a new generation brought together by tragedy, united regardless of their party. Regardless of their other politics, they are together in demanding action.

With every one of these mass tragedies—Parkland, Las Vegas, Charleston, El Paso, Orlando, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Boulder, Indianapolis, and now Oxford, MI—the scourge of gun violence has united these groups in a way that has never happened before, with the hope that Americans will express themselves not only in their neighborhoods and at community meetings but also at the ballot box in order to hold us accountable—truly responsible—for the complicity of Congress. Yes, it is complicity in that death and murder that occur literally every day. More than 100 lives are lost every day.

There are real commonsense solutions here. I don't need to describe them in detail—that will be for another day: expanding background checks and closing loopholes in that background check system, keeping weapons off our streets, funding public health research and community violence intervention programs, protecting domestic violence survivors, setting standards for safe and secure storage, implementing those red flag statutes, and holding the gun industry and its nefarious partners accountable. We know what to do. We know what is necessary to help stop gun violence. There is no mystery here, and this movement—a political movement and social movement—can achieve it.

But I want to talk not only about the grief suffered by families who have lost

loved ones but about the impact on the living who may not even know about Sandy Hook. There are children at schools right now, children who routinely do active shooter drills, diving under their desks or barricading their doors in anticipation of a mass murder in the place that should be the safest to them.

What will this generation think of school? What will this generation think of safety?

Today, in some schools, there was no school because of the copycat threats phoned in to those schools.

What kind of nation has to shut down schools because of the threat of mass murder? Not our Nation, I would hope; not our Nation, if we use our power to make our Nation safer; not our Nation, if we have the same kind of courage and guts and grit that those families of Sandy Hook have. We promised to honor them with action.

We should keep in mind the grace and bravery of people like Kristin and Mike Song, who lost their son, a teenager, at a friend's house, to a shooting that was the result of an unsecured weapon—unsecured because the parents of his friend failed to put it under lock and key. They made it accessible. Kids die like that every day, every week. As our hearts break, we should remember the bravery of Kristin and Michael Song, who crusaded for Ethan's Law, named after their son.

They were here just last week at a vigil—literally, within a stone's throw of the Capitol—reciting their story, seeking to inspire us to act and take that step toward safe storage but taking nobody's gun away. These measures take no one's gun away. They just make it safe to own a gun and to save lives.

We have children. I have four children. My colleagues on the floor have children and families. We remember those days when our kids were 6 years old. We remember the joy and life they brought to our lives.

There is a saying that no parent should outlive a child. Until we know someone who loses a child, but most especially at that age, the power of that saying may have less meaning.

In 10 years, we should have done a lot more, if we mark 10 years without doing more. In 10 years, next year at this time, we should hold ourselves accountable for doing more.

Over this next year, we have work to do. And as dark as December may seem, it is also a season of light. And the heroism of those families, of the first responders, of the community of Sandy Hook should provide us with the inspiration we need to honor those brave and wonderful children, to honor them with action, not just words.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

TRIBUTE TO BRYN STEWART

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to honor an extraordinary public servant. It is my

longtime legislative director, Bryn Stewart.

He is going to be leaving the Senate after a 20-year career of working on behalf of the people of Wyoming.

He served in this great institution under two different U.S. Senators from Wyoming. He and his family have deep roots within our State, and he is a third-generation Wyomingite.

Bryn was born and raised in Sheridan, WY. His father Clyde was a high school business teacher who also coached basketball and the golf team. His mother Jerrie worked at the Sheridan Press, our local newspaper. Both of his parents encouraged him to work hard, to always be respectful, and, most importantly, to be himself, not to be what others expected him to be. Well, he has exceeded all expectations, I will tell you.

Family means everything to Bryn. He is the fifth oldest of seven children. And while it is Bryn's career that we are here to pay tribute to today, in terms of his work in the Senate, his older sister Kendall was the first Stewart sibling to work in the U.S. Senate. She worked for Wyoming Senator Malcolm Wallop. She then came to work in my own office in Sheridan, WY, in Bryn's hometown.

It is also important to point out that Bryn's brother Dow also worked in the U.S. Senate. What a testament to Bryn's parents that so many of their children were committed to public service.

Bryn took a very different route to the U.S. Senate than his siblings. After graduating from the University of Wyoming with a finance degree, Bryn went on to earn his law degree from the College of Law at the university in 1985.

It turns out that Bryn wasn't the only standout from his class that year at the University of Wyoming School of Law. My fellow U.S. Senator from Wyoming, CYNTHIA LUMMIS, was Bryn's classmate in the law school, and the two of them remain great friends to today.

After passing the Wyoming State Bar, Bryn has maintained his membership in the Wyoming Bar for 36 years.

He moved to Gillette, WY, and he started his career there as legal advisor to the Campbell County sheriff and deputy county attorney. Now, I would point out that Campbell County, in Gillette, is the town where Mike Enzi, my former colleague, had been a representative in the legislature as well as the mayor. And Mike Enzi also had graduated, as has Bryn, from Sheridan High School.

Ten years later, Bryn became the director of administrative services for the Campbell County Board of Commissioners. In that role, Bryn was able to balance the budget during a major economic downturn without laying off any employees. This was not an easy achievement.

Now, after more than 16 years of serving the people of Campbell County,

Bryn made the move to Washington, DC. He came to DC to work for my predecessor, Senator Craig Thomas, as his tax and trade counsel. The person who gets full credit for convincing Bryn to come work for the U.S. Senate wasn't Senator Thomas; it wasn't me; it was my incredible wife Bobbi Brown Barrasso who encouraged Bryn to take the job and move across the country.

Bryn fondly tells the story of how my wife Bobbi, who was then the State director for Senator Thomas at the time in 2001, reached out to Bryn about the opportunity that really did change the course of his life and his career.

Now, she knew that he would be a perfect fit for the job. We are all very grateful to Bobbi in so many ways but most certainly for recognizing Bryn's talent and talking him into taking a leap of faith.

Although it turns out a cross-country move wouldn't be the biggest shock of the journey for Bryn—it is a long way from Wyoming to Washington—but he was officially offered the job the Friday before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Many people would have reconsidered moving to Washington, DC, after the largest terrorist attack in our country's history, but Bryn didn't think twice. In fact, it only strengthened his resolve and his commitment to serve the Nation and the people of Wyoming.

It turns out he would need that resolve because during his first week in the DC office, the anthrax attacks occurred against our Nation, against our Capitol, and against a Senate office building. Anonymous letters laced with deadly anthrax arrived in congressional offices, and Bryn, like so many staffers on the Hill, was displaced for months into temporary quarters.

Despite the chaos and the rocky start, Bryn was not deterred, and he immediately jumped into his legislative role at full speed.

For his first 2½ years, Bryn served as counsel for Senator Thomas. He worked on numerous tax and trade bills. Most notably, he helped draft and pass legislation providing critical relief to drought-stricken livestock producers in Wyoming and across the country. Senator Thomas was so impressed with Bryn's work that he promoted him to be his legislative director in 2004.

As you know, legislative directors have a very big job and lots of responsibility. They guide the entire policy staff in developing and implementing the Senator's legislative agenda. As a result, legislative directors must be up to speed on all of the issues.

Bryn recalls one story in particular from his early days as legislative director directly on this point. During the 2005 energy bill debate, Senator Thomas was selected to serve on the conference committee. A week into the committee meetings, Senator Thomas's then-energy legislative assistant was diagnosed with cancer. Never one to back down from a challenge, Bryn immediately stepped in.

He quickly took over the reins, and he helped Senator Thomas successfully lead the fight for Wyoming coal and other important energy resources.

Bryn recounts this experience as one of the highlights of his legislative career—always ready to help, always ready to act.

In 2007, when Wyoming and the Senate tragically lost Senator Craig Thomas to cancer, Bryn was central in supporting our entire staff, many of whom are on the floor today, through an extremely difficult and emotional time. And when I was selected to fill Senator Thomas's seat, I asked Bryn to stay on as my legislative director. It is a decision that I have never regretted.

For more than 14 years, I have been incredibly fortunate to have his advice and his counsel. We worked together on critical issues that will have a lasting and positive impact on Wyoming for decades to come. This includes his great work in helping to pass the Craig Thomas Snake Headwaters Legacy Act, which was signed into law in 2009.

Bryn was also instrumental in securing the return of Wyoming's abandoned mine land funds to our State, which is why I have always referred to him as our hundred-million-dollar man.

Now, these are just a few examples of the work Bryn is most proud of in his 20-year Senate career.

Bryn's dependability and knowledge made him an indispensable member of my team. His work ethic and his dedication are legendary. He stays late; he works weekends; and he does whatever it takes to get the job done. We often joke in the office that Bryn is the first one in the "leg shop" and the last one to leave. It doesn't matter if it is a blizzard outside or a global pandemic, Bryn is infamous for not letting anything keep him from doing the work in the Senate for the benefit of the people of Wyoming.

While I have talked a lot about Bryn's professional accomplishments, I also want to highlight the ways that he continues to give back to the community and give back to others. He makes it his mission to live his life with a purpose. It is one of the reasons he prioritizes giving back to the community as much as he can.

One of his biggest passions is supporting organizations focused on providing food and shelter to those in need. He serves as a member of the Salvation Army board in his local community. He served in organizations that build homeless shelters, operate food pantries, and run low-income energy assistance programs. He is also a member of the Northern Wyoming Community College Advisory Board in Gillette that focuses on providing high-quality, postsecondary education to the people in Campbell County and around Wyoming.

Bryn's departure from the Senate leaves very big shoes to fill. And while we are all sad to see him go, we are happy to know he is moving back to where it all started for him, his hometown, Sheridan, WY.

He will be closer to family, also be able to spend time camping, hiking, and biking through his beloved Bighorn Mountains.

Bryn, Bobbi joins me, along with our entire staff, many of whom are here on the floor—the current staff, but it is also the past staff, the present staff—in commending you on a remarkable career of service.

We are grateful that you chose to dedicate your life to helping make Wyoming and our country a better place to live and a better place to work.

It is with admiration, appreciation, and respect that I wish you every success as you embark on this new adventure. And we are not just saying that because today is your birthday. You will be truly missed.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, first, I want to offer my congratulations to Bryn Stewart.

That was a beautiful speech about the public service that he has contributed to Wyoming and to the U.S. Senate. I thank my colleague from Wyoming for that.

KENTUCKY

Mr. President, I also want to say that over the weekend, I had the opportunity to travel to Kentucky.

I live in Ohio so Kentucky is our neighboring State. I went down to help some of our neighbors get back on their feet after these devastating tornadoes. It was very emotional, partly, obviously, seeing people's lives just be devastated—houses ruined and family heirlooms lost and, unfortunately, some loss of life—as the tornado hit some of the residential areas in Western Kentucky, but also another emotion, which is gratitude for the people who came forward as volunteers to help, neighbor helping neighbor.

As always happens when you have one of these natural disasters, the only silver lining is that people do come together in providing water and food and help getting people out of their homes through urban search and rescue teams, like Ohio Task Force One, that went down to Kentucky chain-sawing trees down so that people can get their cars out and try to repair some of the damage, get their lives back together.

It was a terrible thing to see the devastation but also a wonderful thing to see people coming together to help one another to get through a tough time.

INFLATION

Mr. President, I am on the floor today primarily to talk about the legislation that has been proposed by the Biden administration and by the Democratic leadership.

This is the 11th consecutive week that I have come to the floor to talk about this because, every week since it was introduced 11 weeks ago, I have wanted to talk about what is actually in this legislation, how it would impact our communities, how it would impact our economy.

So, today, I am here to talk a little about some of the new numbers we have in terms of inflation and how this would impact inflation and some of the new numbers that just came out since last week from the Congressional Budget Office, which is the nonpartisan group up here that analyzes these legislative efforts, and what they are saying about what the cost of this bill will be.

So I think it is worth having this conversation before Congress—the Senate and the House—votes on this massive tax bill, a massive spending bill that could fundamentally change the way our economy works and, I think, put us in a very difficult position as it relates to inflation and the economy and our debt and our deficit.

Democrats want to push this through under what is called reconciliation, which is a special procedure here in the Senate where, instead of getting the normal supermajority of 60 votes, they could do it with only 50 votes and then have a tie-breaker be the Vice President in her role as President of the Senate. So I have concerns about the substance of the legislation but also in terms of the process.

Wouldn't it be great if this could actually go through committees and the committees could vet some of these proposals? Last week, I talked about some of the tax proposals, for instance, which I think have inadvertent impacts on pensions—defined benefit plans, in particular—inadvertent effects on businesses that aren't going to be able to write off expansions and plant equipment, which we want them to do.

Maybe some of these things are inadvertent, but it also has a change in the tax policy where it says that the State and local tax deduction would no longer be capped at \$10,000. This is a Federal deduction people are able to take on their State and local taxes, but they would raise that to \$80,000, that cap.

The impact of that and a couple other things in the legislation means that 70 percent of millionaires—people who make over \$1 million in income a year—would get a significant tax cut under this legislation; whereas, if you only make 30,000 bucks a year, only 30 percent of those people get a tax cut.

And that is in the first year. In the second year, it goes down to about half that. And in the third year, it goes down to 10 percent and below. So it really is skewed toward providing tax relief for the wealthy at a time when, obviously, we are concerned about those people. Given the economic uncertainty, given the COVID issues, given the natural disasters, given the other issues that we face, you would want to help those who need the help the most. That is not what this legislation does.

Again, if it had gone through the process of the committees of jurisdiction—in this case, the Finance Committee, the Ways and Means Com-

mittee—I don't think we would be seeing this. All these issues are ones that could have been ironed out had it not been jammed through on this reconciliation process without any committee consideration.

So I am upset that Congress is being thwarted from doing its work, and I think, if we had, it would be a very different piece of legislation.

This plan is also going to hurt, in my view, with regard to inflation. We are looking at the highest inflation we have had in decades. I think everybody knows that now, not because they are looking at the numbers, which I will talk about in a second, but because when they go to the grocery store, they are paying a lot more for a hamburger or for milk or for bread; or when they go to fill up their car with gas, they are seeing the prices at the pump.

I filled up my pickup truck—I took it to Kentucky on the trip I just talked about—and it was almost a hundred bucks to fill it up. That is a lot for people who are on a fixed income or young people or someone who has to commute to work. That really takes a bite out of your budget. But that inflation is across our economy right now, and it is tough on people.

The work shortages that we see, the workforce shortages, the supply chain delays, the inflation—all of these things are problems in our economy right now. All of them get worse, in my view, if we do it the way the Democrats propose because, by adding more fuel to the fire, more stimulus spending—in this case, trillions of dollars—you are going to stimulate more demand in the economy. And inflation happens when demand outstrips supply. So you have a lot of demand for something, but you don't have the supply for it, and it raises inflation.

And that is exactly what many of us predicted would have happened back in March of this year when Congress did the same thing—\$1.9 trillion. A lot of it was stimulus spending. And people said, "This is going to cause inflation," and, sure enough, it did. It wasn't just me and other Republicans. It was some Democrats as well.

So that trend of rising inflation, which has made things so costly and expensive for so many people in my home State of Ohio, shows no sign of slowing down. Late last week, the Labor Department reported that the Consumer Price Index, or the CPI, rose by 6.8 percent over the last 12 months. That is the biggest year-to-year inflationary increase in 39 years—39 years.

And last month, the number for inflation—1 month alone—was 0.8 percent. So get on your calculator and do the math: 0.8 percent in 1 month. Do that times 12 months, and you end up with inflation of 10 percent on an annualized basis. That is just from last month, if we just extrapolate that out over the year.

Ten percent inflation? For those who lived through inflation in the late 1970s, early 1980s, you know what that

does to your economy. So the notion that the Biden administration has that this is going to be temporary or transitory, that is just not true. And, by the way, the Federal Reserve has now said that is not true. It is going to be here for a while.

Although we are hearing a lot of stories these days about businesses paying higher wages to attract workers, average wages went up by 4.3 percent last year. So with all of the labor shortages and the increase in wages, wages went up 4.3 percent. Again, inflation went up 6.8 percent in the same 12-month period.

So this is why, if you are getting a raise at work and you feel pretty good about it—getting the raise—but then you go to the grocery store or go to the gas pump or buy some clothes and you don't feel so good about it, it is because your inflation is higher than your wage gain. So unless your wage gain is over 6.8 percent over the last year, on average, you are losing out. And that is a real problem.

By the way, in 2020, as we got into the COVID-19 crisis, we had a very different economy. In February of 2020, we had the 19th straight month of wage gains of 3 percent or more, and inflation was 1, 1.5 percent. So people were feeling: Hey, I am making more money, and it is not being eaten up by inflation.

That is not the case now, unfortunately. Wages are not keeping pace with these higher prices, and people are finding that their paychecks just don't go as far as they used to.

We can see by some data that just came out from a survey of consumer expectations from the New York Fed that an increasing number of people are reporting that they are struggling more financially than they did a year ago. That is from the Fed, the New York Fed. And fewer are expecting their financial situation to improve by this time next year. That is not a great feeling as we approach the holiday season. That is a real concern.

The other report we have had since I was on the floor last week is with regard to the Producer Price Index. We have talked about the Consumer Price Index. The Producer Price Index is about businesses: What are businesses seeing in terms of inflation on business-to-business purchases, for instance?

The new number out this week on that is the largest increase year over year since we started keeping track of this number, which was about 11 years ago, 12 years ago. So the Producer Price Index is also going up, and the Consumer Price Index is already up.

What this means is that that Producer Price Index number is eventually going to be reflected in higher consumer costs—right?—because businesses are going to pass that along. So this is not a good week because we just got that data, and I was very sorry to see it because what you want to see is the Producer Price Index going down;

meaning that, in the future, the consumer prices are going to go down too. Instead, we are seeing a situation where it is likely that prices are going to keep going up.

Again, Republicans warned of this when the \$1.9 trillion was spent, mostly to stimulate the economy, saying this is going to overheat the economy—more demand, less supply, partly because of COVID. In other words, COVID made it harder to get supply in. If demand goes up, you are going to have inflation. And sure enough, that is what happened.

Larry Summers is the former Secretary of the Treasury under President Obama, former Chair of the national Council of Economic Advisers. Actually, he was Treasury Secretary for President Clinton and Chair of the National Economic Council for President Obama, a respected economist. He, too, warned of this. So it is not just a partisan issue, not Republicans and Democrats. It is the reality of what is happening when you increase demand much more than supply can handle. You get inflation. So it is not a surprise that it happened. Unfortunately, his prediction came true: overheated economy, demand outstripping supply. We found ourselves in this spiral of rising prices.

That was 9 months ago. I think it is fair to say that the inflation that people said was transitory is going to stay here for a while. That is a real cause for concern.

So why are we doing this? Why are we, again, spending trillions of dollars? And what is the cost?

Something that happened since we talked last week is that the true cost of the Build Back Better plan is now being revealed by this group on the outside from the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School, by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, and by others, but now by the Congressional Budget Office itself.

So the Congressional Budget Office is the nonpartisan group up here in Congress that tells us what the fiscal impact is, what the spending impact is, what the taxing impact is, what the economic impact is of legislation.

And the number that has been cited for the cost of this Build Back Better legislation is \$1.7 trillion over 10 years. That is a lot. That would make it the second most expensive bill ever passed by Congress, the first being the \$1.9 trillion we talked about in March.

But it is worse than that because it turns out that even those staggeringly high costs we just talked about—\$1.7 trillion—miss the mark based on the analysis that just came out. Just as prices for everyday goods and services are going up, the estimates we are seeing for the true cost of Build Back Better are increasing with every analysis we see.

These studies have shown us that because the legislation sunsets programs, if you actually assume those programs are not going to be stopped after—let's

say with the child tax credit—1 year or 2 years or 3 years, but you continue it through the life of the legislation, it is going to be much more expensive.

So people tell me: Well, Rob, that is fine, but the child tax credit, as an example, only costs \$185 billion—only.

And I say: Well, actually, if you take it out over time, that becomes trillions of dollars—like \$1.6, \$1.7 trillion.

They say: Well, we are just going to do it for 1 year.

Well, that is just not what happens here in Congress. The history of this is that once we put a program like that in place, it continues to live on year after year.

Let me give you the best example of that. You have probably heard a lot of Democrats saying over the past few weeks: We have to pass this Build Back Better legislation by the end of this year.

Why? Because the child tax credit—it is already in law based on the March legislation—is expiring. So there is a tremendous amount of pressure, right? They are saying you have to extend it.

Well, that makes our case. So you have to extend it this year? That means, I assume, you have to extend it next year and the next year and the next year and the next year.

And anybody who says that they don't want to extend it—on the other side of the aisle—I would like to hear from them because I don't think they are going to say that. And so, if you assume it is extended, then you have this huge cost. The spending is going to continue to increase, and the program is not going to sunset. The total cost of the bill goes from \$1.7 trillion that we talked about to about \$4.5 trillion based on the Penn Wharton study I talked about.

Under the Congressional Budget Office analysis, it actually goes even higher—even higher—to \$4.9 trillion. And when you add interest on the debt, it goes actually over \$5 trillion.

So it is difficult to understand these numbers we are talking about because they are so huge. You know, \$4.5 trillion is \$4,500 billion. We have never spent this kind of money before. I mean, if it is \$5 trillion, that is the size of our budget, more or less—the whole budget for the entire country for a year, in one bill.

Now, people say: Well, it is paid for. Well, the 1.7 part, you could argue, is paid for—although we can talk about that, too, because some of the things in the pay-fors are not sustainable in my view, including, again, the impact on pension funds or the impact on being able to write off investments or the impact of the SALT issue. So there are lots of things that need to be worked out on the spending side but also on the revenue side.

So let's assume it is \$1.7 trillion, but that is not going to cover it because you have these expenses—like the child tax credit—that will continue.

So I am glad that my colleague Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, who is the rank-

ing member of the Budget Committee, a top Republican, and Senator JOHN CORNYN, another colleague, asked the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office to do their analysis, because they showed that, without the sunset, the 10-year cost of the child tax credit goes from \$185 billion to \$1.6 trillion.

They also found that, in line with another study by the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation, the revenue lost would be \$1.6 trillion, either taking us further into debt by \$1.6 trillion or requiring new tax hikes.

So that is just one part of the legislation. It would be the costliest expenditure by Congress in our history, but it is just one part of the legislation. The hundreds of billions in funding Democrats are proposing as an example for childcare under a new approach to childcare, which we can also talk about, the substance of that, but it is going to hurt a lot of our State the way they are doing it. But that will end up costing double the written amount over the next decade if they remain in place, for example.

So all in all, the Congressional Budget Office looked at 18 supposedly sunset social spending programs and found that they will end up costing the taxpayers nearly \$3.5 trillion over the next decade when they get extended, if they do. Again, the history around here is that they would. So, you know, the price tag goes up and up and up.

When you add that spending to another program in Build Back Better, the CBO says the total spending in the legislation, again, goes to \$4.9 trillion; \$4.9 trillion is bigger than the economy of any country in the world, with the exception of the U.S., China, and Japan.

Again, these numbers are just astronomical. But think about that. It is bigger than the entire economy, the entire GDP of any country in the world except for the three of us: the United States, China, and Japan.

We are seeing record debts and record deficits right now, as you know. The Congressional Budget Office says that the American people can expect Build Back Better, if the sunsets don't hold, to add another \$3 trillion to the Federal deficit.

So if we continue to debate this in Congress, which way should we go, we just ought to know these numbers. We ought to analyze them. And again, if people on the other side of the aisle are going to say we don't want to have the child tax credit be extended, we need to know that. But my sense is, just as they want to extend it right now, they will want to extend it next year and the next year and the next year.

So is this the right time to do that? Is this the right time to add that kind of stimulus to an economy that already is overstimulated, where you have more demand chasing not enough supply, do you want to add more to the demand side? That is what is going to happen if we pass this.

I hope that we will not make that mistake, and I hope that we will slow

down and look at these numbers and analyze where we are in terms of our spending. We just extended the debt limit. No Republican voted for it, but all the Democrats voted for it, and that is all they needed to be able to extend the debt limit because it was under a special 50-vote margin. That debt limit was just extended for basically 1 year. So after the elections next year, \$2.5 trillion more debt. We had to make room for \$2.5 trillion more debt, in 1 year.

It is clear that a lot of Americans are nervous about that. When you look at the polling data, it says that. But just talking to people—over the weekend, I was also in southeast Ohio, part of our State that is very rural, a lot of people are hurting in terms of the economy because they don't have access to broadband and so on. So we are talking about how they feel about the economy, and there is a lot of nervousness. They feel the surging inflation. They are paying more for everything.

And, you know, common steps, people are saying, Let's just slow down and think about this. They may end up thinking at the end of the day they are for some of this, but they don't want to move forward precipitously and make a mistake and have this add more inflation and more problems for our debt and deficit for our kids and grandkids. They are saying, Let's do the right thing for the country and put the brakes on this.

And if we do put the brakes on this unprecedented spending and taxing, it will help us to avoid some of these economic challenges that we otherwise are going to be facing. If we go ahead with it, it is going to make the economic challenges like inflation even worse.

My hope is that we will put the brakes on, and these economic challenges will not worsen, and instead, we can get the country back on the right track.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HASSAN). The Senator from Washington.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations en bloc: Calendar Nos. 402, 587, 606; that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that any statements related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nominations of Thea D. Rozman Kendler, of Maryland,

to be an Assistant Secretary of Commerce; Alanna McCargo, of Virginia, to be President, Government National Mortgage Association; and Dawn N. Ison, of Michigan, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan for the term of four years?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nominations en bloc: Calendar Nos. 497, 597, and 598; that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc without intervening action or debate; that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that any statement related to the nominations be printed in the RECORD and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nominations of Nickolas Guertin, of Virginia, to be Director of Operational Test and Evaluation, Department of Defense; John Bradley Sherman, of Texas, to be Chief Information Officer of the Department of Defense; and Carrie Frances Ricci, of Virginia, to be General Counsel of the Department of the Army?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, and all nominations on the Secretary's desk in the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Navy, and Space Force; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc; the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action and the Senate then resume legislative session.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The nominations considered and confirmed are as follows:

IN THE ARMY

The following named Army National Guard of the United States officer for appointment in the Reserve of the Army to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., sections 12203 and 12211:

To be major general

Brig. Gen. William J. Prendergast, IV

The following named officer for appointment to the grade indicated in the United States Army while serving as Chief Defense Counsel for Military Commissions under article II, section 2, clause 2 of the United States Constitution and section 1037 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014:

To be brigadier general

Col. Jackie L. Thompson, Jr.

IN THE SPACE FORCE

The following named officer for appointment to the grade in the United States Space Force under title 10, U.S.C., section 624:

To be brigadier general

Col. Timothy A. Sejba

IN THE ARMY

The following named Army National Guard of the United States officer for appointment in the Reserve of the Army to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., sections 12203 and 12211:

To be major general

Brig. Gen. Roger D. Lyles

IN THE MARINE CORPS

The following named officers for appointment in the United States Marine Corps to the grade indicated under title 10, U.S.C., section 624:

To be major general

Brig. Gen. James H. Adams, III

Brig. Gen. Eric E. Austin

Brig. Gen. Michael J. Borgschulte

Brig. Gen. William J. Bowers

Brig. Gen. Stephen E. Liszewski

Brig. Gen. Keith D. Reventlow

Brig. Gen. Sean M. Salene

Brig. Gen. Roberta L. Shea

Brig. Gen. Benjamin T. Watson

Brig. Gen. Christian F. Wortman

NOMINATIONS PLACED ON THE SECRETARY'S DESK

IN THE AIR FORCE

PN1307 AIR FORCE nomination of Troy J. Johnson, which was received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1308 AIR FORCE nomination of Mary T. Guest, which was received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1309 AIR FORCE nomination of Eric J. Jordan, which was received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1310 AIR FORCE nominations (24) beginning ZACHARY P. AUGUSTINE, and ending MICHAEL L. TOOMER, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1311 AIR FORCE nominations (11) beginning CHAD A. BELLAMY, and ending ANDREW L. THORNLEY, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1312 AIR FORCE nominations (37) beginning ROSS ANDREW BROWN, and ending LISA MARIE WOTKOWICZ, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1313 AIR FORCE nominations (25) beginning KIP T. AVERETT, and ending DANIEL S. WALKER, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1314 AIR FORCE nominations (73) beginning SHAWN J. ALVES, and ending ALEXANDER J. ZOLL, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1315 AIR FORCE nominations (29) beginning PATRICK E. BRACKEN, and ending THADDAEUS J. WERNER, which nominations were received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of October 27, 2021.

PN1329 AIR FORCE nomination of Anthony W. Perez, which was received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of November 1, 2021.

PN1330 AIR FORCE nomination of Dustin R. Meredith, which was received by the Senate and appeared in the Congressional Record of November 1, 2021.