

the other side of the aisle have pledged loyalty—pledged loyalty—to the importance of States' rights that they are going to leave the decision on abortion to the States. But Senator GRAHAM has shown us that all his talk about States' rights means that the States have to agree with Senator GRAHAM. That is what his idea about States' rights is all about.

His bill tramples, for example, on the rights of Oregonians, who sure don't share Senator GRAHAM's view on this, and people in many other States, women and men who voted to protect abortion, women's healthcare, and women's individual freedom.

Senator GRAHAM's bill is about control. It is about government—government—mind these words—government having control over women's bodies rather than women having control over their bodies.

It is also clear that what has always been envisioned is not just a nationwide ban on abortions but criminalizing this with women and doctors at some point, I gather, possibly locked behind bars.

It is election season and Senator MCCONNELL wants everybody to forget the Republicans' top priorities include passing these extreme restrictions through Congress and the courts. I believe that Americans know better. When it comes to this kind of legislation that is so far removed—far removed—from the moderate claim of its sponsor, I think we ought to recognize what we are looking at is a total national abortion ban, criminalization, and the rights of women curtailed and the power of government over them increased.

Senator GRAHAM's bill is the next step in that direction for Republicans. Introducing his proposal, Senator GRAHAM basically confirmed that:

If [we] take back the House and Senate, I can assure you we'll have a vote [on our bill].

Madam President, I think we have a lot of speakers coming, but I think the American people ought to take Senator GRAHAM at his word. This is what his agenda is about. This is what he is going to be championing from sea to shining sea. I just hope we do everything we can here in the Senate—in this country—to make sure that the Graham bill does not see the light of day.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, yesterday, new data showed what Texans have known and felt for months: that inflation simply is not letting up. Last month, prices were up 8.3 percent from a year ago.

Economist Larry Summers, a well-known former president of Harvard University and member of Presidential Cabinets, said that this CPI report, Consumer Price Index report, confirms that the United States has a serious inflation problem.

Rent is up 6.7 percent. If you go to the grocery store to feed your family, groceries are 13.5 percent over what they were last year. If you are a senior citizen suffering through the hot Texas summer and need your air-conditioner to work overtime, electricity to make that air-conditioner run is up 16 percent. Of course, that is just since last August, just a year ago, when we were already battling runaway inflation.

But here is an even more shocking figure: Since President Biden took office on January 20, 2021, prices have risen 13 percent. So 13 cents out of every dollar that you earn—poof—has gone away. You are that much poorer. Your standard of living has been decreased by 13 percent.

Inflation, of course, far outpaces wage growth, meaning the average American has effectively been handed a pay cut. A single paycheck doesn't go nearly as far today as it did a year ago.

This is exactly what was predicted by leading economists when our Democratic colleagues ran off with the taxpayer credit card at the end of last year. They abused the rules of the Senate to spend an additional \$2 trillion in the name of COVID relief even though less than 10 percent of the money was directly related to the pandemic.

I want to differentiate between what we did together on a bipartisan basis to deal with COVID when we spent nearly \$5 trillion on a bipartisan basis. There is no doubt this was a grave emergency, a public health emergency, economic emergency. We did what we had to do, and we got through it. But even after that, our Democratic colleagues couldn't seem to kick the spending habits and unilaterally spent an extra \$2 trillion. As I said, even though 10 percent of that money was related to the pandemic, 90 percent, then, was unrelated.

Then the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, which the President was celebrating yesterday when the stock market fell 1,200 points—this partisan bill amounts to another \$240 billion in unnecessary spending, while raising taxes at the same time.

As I said, our colleagues ironically call this bill the Inflation Reduction Act, and the White House chose yesterday—the day that the latest disappointing inflation figures were released—to celebrate its passage.

Inflation Reduction Act is false advertising. The Penn Wharton economic review of the Inflation Reduction Act said there is no reduction of inflation for at least 2 full years, and, indeed, it may actually get worse. But we all knew this intuitively, that if you keep spending this much money, you are basically pouring gasoline on the inflation fire. It is going to get worse and

worse and worse, and middle-class working families all across this country have gotten hurt as a result.

Since our Democratic colleagues took control of both Houses of Congress and the White House, Texans' lives have gotten harder, not easier. Inflation I have spoken to has skyrocketed, real wages have fallen, and our economy has fallen into a recession.

Now, this is one of the other curious things about defining terms. Our Democratic colleagues want to argue about whether two consecutive quarters of negative GDP are actually a recession or not. Well, they were when Republicans were in charge, but apparently when Democrats are in charge, that definition doesn't apply.

Much as they tried but failed to convince the American people that the Inflation Reduction Act would actually reduce inflation, it didn't, and it won't anytime soon.

Well, we know that the response to inflation by the Federal Reserve has been to raise interest rates, and they are projected to raise them at least three-quarters of 1 percent or 75 basis points, which will also slow down the economy and hurt job creation. So it looks like even more pain is coming.

#### RAILWAY LABOR MANAGEMENT DISPUTE

Madam President, well, unfortunately, we are also told that there is a looming rail strike that will have a tremendously negative impact on our economy. Our economy, as we all know, depends on a network of tractor-trailers, planes, trains, and cargo ships to transport products around the United States and beyond. These are the very same transportation modes that make sure that your grocery store is fully stocked, that the manufacturing plants have inventory they need in order to make their products, and that, yes, our packages that we order show up on our front door step on time.

But a massive disruption in rail transportation is likely to occur in less than 2 days' time. The unions that represent more than 115,000 rail workers have not been able to reach a contract agreement with railroad companies. Unless they reach a breakthrough soon, rail workers will go on strike this Friday, causing a national rail shutdown.

If you don't think that will have a negative impact on our economy on top of what we have already mentioned, think again. The rail system carries nearly 30 percent of America's freight, everything from agriculture to retail products, heavy equipment, automobiles, coal, lumber. We are talking about the critical products that impact virtually every sector of the economy.

It is tough to overstate the negative impact this will have. Just look at agriculture. On the front end of production, farmers and ranchers need fertilizer, seed, animal feed, and heavy equipment, all of which are likely to travel by rail at some point. Then, at harvest time, our producers rely on

timely rail service to transport their products to processing plants and then communities across the country.

If this strike goes into effect, all of those shipments will be stalled, and this comes right as we are heading into the fall harvest. Farmers and ranchers will be left with huge amounts of products they can't even transport or sell, many of these perishable products, which will simply spoil. The consequence for consumers is we will continue to see empty shelves at the grocery stores, along with higher prices due to inflation and short supply.

But this won't just impact us in the United States. Railroads move roughly a third of U.S. grain exports, which are desperately needed in global markets, particularly with what is happening in Ukraine, with Russia impeding the growing and transportation of grain to places like Africa, where people are literally starving for lack of food. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated this food insecurity. If this shutdown here in America goes into effect, the squeeze will be compounded and will be even tighter.

Of course, this is just a snapshot of the impact a shutdown will have on one sector of the economy, but the same struggles will play out when it comes to energy, rail, manufacturing, automotive, and literally just about every other sector of the economy.

This massive logjam will take a serious toll on our economy on top of inflation and the recessionary pressures we are already feeling. The freight industry estimates that a rail shutdown could cost the U.S. economy more than \$2 billion a day—\$2 billion a day.

Our country is hurtling toward a logistical nightmare, and unfortunately the Biden administration appears to be frozen and undecided about what to do. For years, our Democratic colleagues who depend on organized labor for a major part of their political support have put the demands of labor unions ahead of the needs of consumers and the rest of the American people. They have romanced the powerful labor lobby at every turn, and one of the fiercest union defenders now occupies the Oval Office.

Now, I am not opposed to people joining unions. They are entitled to collectively bargain and try to advance their livelihood and their family's way of life. But to let one special interest group basically create a logistical nightmare with this looming rail strike is just indefensible.

Well, we are seeing the consequences of this kowtowing to organized labor above the interests of any and all other Americans.

To hopefully prevent this looming crisis, President Biden has established an emergency Board to help reach a resolution and prevent this strike, if possible. The Board released its recommendations to resolve this dispute nearly a month ago, but a deal is still nowhere in sight.

In recent weeks, a number of administration officials have joined the

unions and freight companies at the negotiating table. The Secretaries of Labor, Transportation, and Agriculture have all tried to help resolve the impasse, but they have not moved the needle at all.

I don't know how much havoc is in store, but it is not looking good. Many shipments have already stopped out of fear that the operations will stop midjourney. I read that even commuter trains like Amtrak have already canceled some of their routes because they know what sort of impact this strike will have if no deal is reached by Friday.

Inflation has already sent prices to an untenable high. The supply chain breakdown is sure to send those prices even higher.

Families can anticipate product shortages across the board from grocery stores to car lots. Shoppers can expect packages that they have ordered to be delayed for days or even weeks on end. And drivers should expect to see more trucks on the highway to fill the gap when the railroad shuts down.

This is just another example of the failure of the Biden administration to anticipate and to address the problems that the American people are facing. It seems there is a huge disconnect between what is happening here in Washington among our Democratic friends and the Biden administration and what I hear from my constituents back home. And I think that is true largely across the Nation; that the elites in Washington have become completely decoupled from the rest of the country.

What that produces is special interest legislation that pleases some constituents: labor unions, climate activists, and open borders advocates.

The Biden administration and our Democratic majority have used their power in Washington to spend trillions of dollars on things that the American people don't want while compounding the problems that they are facing day in and day out: inflation, a recession, a paralyzing supply chain shutdown on the horizon, a spike in crime, and then, of course, an open border, which has allowed enough illegal drugs to be imported into the United States that it took 108,000 American lives last year. And 71,000 of those 108,000 lives were as a result of synthetic opioids like fentanyl.

Synthetic opioids are raging like a brush fire across the entire country, and we are seeing, for example, at middle schools and high schools in places like Hays County, right outside of Austin, TX, where I live, that young people, unbeknownst to themselves, ingest small amounts of this fentanyl and ultimately end up overdosing and dying from it.

So there are huge challenges facing our country. We need to do our job. We need to work together. No one is suggesting that we give up our principles. Republicans are Republicans and Democrats are Democrats for a reason—because they view the role and

the size of the government differently. Our Democratic colleagues seem to think that Washington and government is the answer to every problem. Republicans and conservatives, on the other hand, tend to favor individual initiative and entrepreneurship and investment to create jobs and an opportunity for people to get jobs and provide for their family and pursue their dream.

But there is plenty of overlap where we can agree, but we have to fight inflation. We have to deal with things like the paralyzing supply chain and the threat from a rail strike that appears now to be imminent.

We have got to do more to support our men and women in uniform—the police—as they battle crime in our neighborhoods and our communities, which seems to have gone up exponentially in recent years.

And then, of course, there is the one big, gaping, open sore that our Democratic colleagues have ignored completely, and that is our open border.

I mentioned the drugs, but in addition to the drugs, we have seen 2.3 million migrants show up at the border just since President Biden became President because they know they are going to be able to get into the country.

And they are probably going to be able to stay because the Biden administration simply does not have any plan in place to decide asylum claims—who has legitimate claims and who does not—so they engage in a program of catch-and-release. With the litigation backlogs in our immigration courts, it is no surprise that when years go by and your ticket comes up and you are told to show up in immigration court, that people simply fade into the great American landscape and avoid detection.

The only people benefiting from this, beyond the occasional migrant, are the drug cartels and the transnational criminal organizations that network people from around the world.

I know of many people who aren't from a border State like I am who think that these migrants are just from Mexico or Central America. But if you talk to the Border Patrol sector chiefs in Del Rio or the Rio Grande Valley, they will tell you they are detaining people from as many as 150 different countries.

Now, surely, the majority are from Mexico and Central America, but it ought to cause us a lot of concern when somebody can get to our back door from another country and then falsely claim asylum only to be released into the interior of the United States and never heard from again.

These are all fixable problems if we will work together, but so far, while the American people may have thought they elected Joe Biden, a moderate, they basically have seen BERNIE SANDERS' agenda.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4483

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, have you ever gone out to eat at a restaurant with a group of people, but your order was cheaper than everyone else's? Maybe you weren't as hungry or the restaurant the group picked was more expensive than you could afford so you were selective about what you ordered. Then, when the check comes, someone suggested the group split it evenly.

Now, what is your immediate reaction? You are upset, of course, because you ordered the salad not the filet mignon or you drank water, not the expensive bottle of wine. You ordered what you wanted, and they ordered what they wanted; you shouldn't be on the hook for their cost.

Sadly, this illustration is far too real, as last month, Joe Biden announced that he would cancel billions of dollars in student loans.

Now, let's be clear. He isn't canceling student debt. No, he is transferring that debt to every American taxpayer. Now a construction worker in Florida is having to foot the bill for the loans of a Harvard grad, which they voluntarily accepted for an education they received.

So here is what Democrats are trying to say to that construction worker: You didn't go to college; Democrats don't care. You will pay the debt of lawyers and doctors, and you will pay for those who want Ph.D.s in poetry. Talk about poetic injustice. You went to community college or a State school and worked to graduate debt-free. Tough luck. Joe Biden wants you to pay for the advanced degrees of the privileged few. Your tax dollars are now the money pot for other people's student debt.

Of course, Joe Biden's plan doesn't even begin to address the real reason for rising higher education costs. That is universities' decades-long practice of unnecessarily raising tuition.

As Governor of Florida, I addressed that problem and challenged our universities to keep education affordable.

Look at the University of Florida. Undergraduate tuition and fees for this academic year are less than \$6,500. It is the fifth best public university in the country. You will get a fantastic education there. Meanwhile, at Harvard, tuition fees for an academic year cost more than \$57,000.

There are ways to make education affordable, but the Democrats and elites aren't interested in those solutions. That is why Joe Biden is engaging in this reckless move even though it doesn't solve the real issue and even though he lacks the proper constitutional authority.

Everybody knows this. That is why, in July of last year, NANCY PELOSI herself denied that the President had such power.

She said:

The president can't do it . . . That's not even a discussion.

Yet now the Department of Justice is engaging in interpretive gymnastics to co-opt legislation that was passed to help our servicemembers in the aftermath of 9/11. It is a desperate attempt to stretch a good law well beyond its intent so that Joe Biden can give handouts to his liberal voters and Harvard pals.

Biden wants to spend money that Congress has not appropriated for a loan forgiveness that Congress has not authorized. It is illegal. It is unconstitutional. It is a gross abuse of authority, and I won't stand for it. Congress must assert its authority here. We have the power of the purse, not the President.

That is why I have introduced the Debt Cancellation Accountability Act. My bill would require the Department of Education to get an express appropriation from Congress before they could propose waiving, discharging, or reducing student loan debt to two or more borrowers in an amount greater than \$1 million. If we want to transfer the debt of some and make everyone pay for it, then Congress has to make that decision.

We should simply put it up for a vote. Of course, the Democrats here in the Senate won't do that. Surely, they could have passed a bill by now if they had really wanted to, but they wanted Biden to do it alone. It is easy to see why. In just the past few weeks, we have heard families from across the country speaking out against Biden's unfair and disastrous proposal. I am hearing about it from Floridians every day, and I know my colleagues are too.

I would like to thank Senators BARRASSO, LUMMIS, and BRAUN for supporting my Debt Cancellation Accountability Act and for choosing to stand with me against Biden's overreach.

Let's pass this bill today to reverse Joe Biden's unlawful decision and force Congress to decide this issue.

Before I ask for unanimous consent, I would like to turn to my colleague Senator BRAUN from the great State of Indiana.

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

Mr. BRAUN. I thank Senator SCOTT.

Mr. President, President Biden's student loan debt transfer does not cancel or forgive anything. These debts will still be paid. It is not like they go away.

What else does it say about the whole idea that, when you take on an obligation and you agree to it, you can just shirk it or get rid of it? There are many people across the country who would want to be in on that gambit as well. He has simply shifted the cost of repayment on to everyone, including to the 65 percent of American workers who chose not to get a college degree.

What about the aspiring plumber or electrician who borrowed \$20,000, \$30,000, or \$40,000 for his or her own business? There would be no end to it.

We should focus on getting more value out of colleges rather than giving them another reason to hike prices. Sadly, the only place where that has been focused on is in my own home State, where Mitch Daniels, the ex-Governor of Indiana, froze tuition into 10 years. That is getting more value out, and that is why their enrollment has gone way up.

With a national debt of nearly \$31 trillion, we can't continue to pile on more debt. When Senator SCOTT and I got here just a little over 3½ years ago, we were \$18 trillion in debt. We throw "trillions" around now like we used to "hundreds of billions," and it is on the backs of our kids and grandkids every time we do it.

Today, Federal Student Aid owns \$1.6 trillion in outstanding Federal assets—in other words, student loans. The loan program needs to be completely redone so that colleges will be motivated to lower costs. This is an excuse to do the opposite.

Finally, President Biden's actions are illegal in the first place. The President doesn't have the authority to cancel all of this debt. I am hoping it gets taken to court, because what does it say, again, for future generations or anyone who makes a commitment to take on debt who can shirk it with the stroke of a pen?

Even Speaker PELOSI agreed on this point, saying she didn't think it was legal. Yet it doesn't make any difference in this day and age as we plow forward.

This is why the Debt Cancellation Accountability Act requires the Department of Education to get express appropriation from Congress to pay for any Federal student loan the Department proposes to waive, discharge, or reduce.

I yield the floor to Senator SCOTT.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. I am so thankful for Senator BRAUN's support on this bill and for all of the work he has done to raise awareness about Biden's reckless spending agenda and to stand for fiscal sanity.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of S. 4483 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, this is a shameful attempt by the Republicans to keep working Americans buried under mountains of student debt.

President Biden's decision to cancel up to \$20,000 of Federal student debt for as many as 43 million Americans with incomes under \$125,000 a year is a historic step to delivering life-changing relief to working families and to helping rebuild America's middle class.

Senator SCOTT's bill is just one of the Republicans' desperate efforts to block cancellation for millions of Americans. Now, the Republicans are happy to pass out tax breaks and regulatory loopholes for billionaires and giant corporations, but they are fighting tooth and nail to keep working families from getting a penny of relief.

Evidently, Senator SCOTT believes that \$2 trillion in Republican tax cuts that were not paid for is fine so long as those tax cuts are aimed mostly at millionaires, billionaires, and giant corporations. But a program that costs a fraction as much and for which 90 percent of its benefits go to people earning less than \$75,000 a year is now somehow a moral outrage.

Today, he claims to worry about those taxpayers who he says will shoulder student loan cancellation, but where was Senator SCOTT, or then-Governor Scott, when Donald Trump and the congressional Republicans handed out \$2 trillion in tax breaks to billionaires and giant corporations, not a penny of which was paid for? Where was he then?

Well, he endorsed the Trump administration's plan to cut taxes for corporations, and he celebrated those tax breaks for the richest among us. He wasn't worried about how taxpayers would pay that off—not a word about the fairness for all of the people who would bear that burden, so long as the benefits went mostly to the rich and powerful.

Senator SCOTT has basically laid it all out there for America to see, and that difference—helping billionaires or helping working families—pretty much sums up Republican and Democratic differences across the board. If we are cutting a break for the rich and the powerful, the Republicans are on board. If we are trying to help out working people, congressional Republicans take to their fainting couches and claim to be so worried about the national debt.

Student loan cancellation is very popular in America, including with a majority of people who have no student loan debt. That is because there is scarcely a working person anywhere in America today who does not know someone who is choking on student loan debt. Yet, evidently, the Republicans in Congress live in bubbles that prevent them from meeting any of the millions of people out there who have busted their tails, who have worked multiple jobs, who have made their debt loads continue to climb.

So let me just set the record straight here. I want to repeat an earlier point. Nearly 90 percent of relief dollars from President Biden's cancellation will go to Americans earning less than \$75,000

a year, and none—none—of the help goes to people making more than \$125,000 a year.

Now, actually, those numbers shouldn't be shocking. Think about who owns student loan debt. Senator SCOTT talked about Harvard multiple times in his speech, but it is not the wealthy people who go to Ivy League schools who end up with the student loan debt. It is middle- and working-class Americans who were born into families who couldn't afford to pay out-of-pocket. In fact, 99.7 percent of borrowers did not attend an Ivy League school. So that would mean—what?—three-tenths of 1 percent of people who went to Ivy League schools borrowed money.

By comparison—I just looked it up while the Senator was speaking—at the University of Florida, 15 percent have to borrow in order to make it through to graduation. At Florida State, 26 percent—that is one in every four people at Florida State—has to take out money in order to be in college. At Florida A&M, the numbers are even higher: 68 percent. More than two-thirds of the people who are in school have to take out money in order to make it through college. This is true across the country. At State schools, about half of all students have to borrow to make it through. At historically Black colleges and universities, the number is about 90 percent.

So let's be really clear about who exactly congressional Republicans are trying to take relief away from. It is not Ivy Leaguer doctors and lawyers. Who are the people the Senate Republicans say aren't worthy of the kind of help that billionaires and giant corporations could get in their big tax package? Who do Senate Republicans think should be squeezed harder? Who do Senate Republicans say should simply be left behind?

Well, the Senate Republicans want to leave behind the 42 percent of borrowers who do not even have a 4-year college diploma. These are folks who took out money—loans—in order to become a nurse's aide, to become a mechanic, to go to beauty school, to get a commercial driver's license to drive a truck, and, too often, the wages that they were promised never materialized.

Senate Republicans say: Let them struggle. Leave them behind.

Who gets the most help under President Biden's cancellation? Senator SCOTT said this is all about doctors and lawyers. Let's take a look at that.

The share of student loan borrowers who earned a cosmetology certificate is about double the share of borrowers who got professional degrees in law and medicine combined.

Senate Republicans say: Let those cosmetology certificate holders struggle. Leave them behind.

Similarly, there are more student loan borrowers who took out debt to earn a certificate for driving trucks and working on the railroad than those who did so to become dentists and optometrists.

Senate Republicans say: Let those truckdrivers and railroad workers struggle. Leave them behind.

It is not just the people who have 2-year degrees or certificates who get help under President Biden's cancellation. It is the people who don't have any degree at all. These are people who did everything our country asked them to do by graduating from high school and advancing their educations, but life happened: They got pregnant or they had to take care of a sick family member, and they had to leave before finishing their degree.

Senate Republicans say: Let them struggle. Leave them behind.

Who gets help? It is women, who hold nearly two-thirds of all outstanding student loan debt. Black women, in particular, shoulder a disproportionate amount of the student loan debt burden—Black women, who hold more debt than any other group.

Senate Republicans say: Let them struggle. Leave them behind.

Who gets help? It is Black Americans, who borrow more money to go to college, borrow more money in college, and have a harder time paying it off after college. They are the ones who will see their debt eliminated under President Biden's cancellation plan. Senate Republicans say: Let them struggle. Leave them behind.

Who gets help? It is the 50 percent of Latino borrowers with debt who will see their student loan debt completely eliminated. Senate Republicans say let them struggle. Leave them behind.

Who gets help? It is the millions of people who couldn't save for retirement, or buy their first home, or start a family because of student debt. Senate Republicans say let them struggle. Leave them behind.

We are living in a moment when the President of the United States has reached out, literally, to tens of millions of families and said: I am putting government on your side. But the congressional Republicans are determined to make this country work even better for the rich and the powerful. That is why they are trying to pass the bill that Senator SCOTT has advanced.

These Republicans are all for giving handouts to giant corporations and billionaires. But the minute—the minute—that our country creates a little breathing room for the millions of hard-working people whose biggest sin is they tried to get an education and they grew up in a family that just couldn't afford to pay for it, those Senate Republicans are right here on this Senate floor trying to undo it.

I want to take a minute and just look at the bigger picture to see how we got here.

We have a student debt crisis because our government stopped investing in higher education and began shifting the costs of college onto working families.

I went to a great public university that costs \$50 a semester—a price I could pay for on a part-time

waitressing job. I got to become a teacher, a law professor, and a U.S. Senator because higher education opened a million doors for a kid like me. But that opportunity no longer exists in America.

Today, college costs thousands, even tens of thousands, of dollars. And instead of investing taxpayer dollars to help bring down those costs, the State governments reduced their financial support, and the Federal Government told everyone to borrow the money they needed to cover the rising costs of going to school. That has left millions of Americans drowning in student loan debt.

What is worse, families have had to navigate a broken student loan system riddled with bad actors who are trying to take advantage of and profit off keeping them in debt.

During the Trump years, Betsy DeVos, the Secretary of Education, threw in with the for-profit schools. And when students who had been cheated asked for some help, she turned her back.

I have long pushed for more accountability and more oversight to bring down the cost of college and to make higher education and training programs more accessible. I have a plan for that. In fact, I have more than one plan for that, and I welcome any Republican to join me in helping make any of these options reality.

But cancellation is the first step to fixing a broken student loan system and to delivering relief to families who have been trapped in it for far too long.

One final point: The President's plan to cancel student debt will make a huge difference for tens of millions of Americans in their day-to-day lives. But it will do so much more. Debt cancellation is about strengthening our whole economy. Better educated workers make us a wealthier nation and one with more opportunity, not just for those at the top but more opportunity for everyone.

Just consider one example. Following World War II, a grateful nation said to returning GIs that taxpayers would pick up the cost of college and technical training. More than 2 million veterans went to college or graduate school and nearly 6 million used this opportunity to pursue vocational training to become construction workers, electricians, mechanics, and other careers. Together, these men—and they were nearly all men—built America's middle class.

Taxpayer investments in post-high school education meant that millions of people were better educated, and they helped fuel an economic boom that lasted for decades and lifted this entire Nation. And it was a bargain. Every dollar that was spent on educating our veterans generated \$7 to taxpayers. That is not even counting for the significant boost to productivity from a more educated population. Just think about that: a 7-to-1 payoff for investing in higher education for all our people.

President Biden saw something that he could do to help tens of millions of Americans struggling under the weight of student debt and invest in the future of our economy, so he did it. Debt cancellation was the right thing to do. That is why the majority of Americans—with or without loans—support cancellation.

I am celebrating because cancellation will provide life-changing relief for working families across this country. That is why I object to the Senate Republican's shameless attempt to deny people the relief they need.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. BRAUN. So the plan that the Democrats are going to give you, not only on this, was put out clearly in President Biden's blueprint for our country to put us \$45 trillion in debt in 10 years, where we will be paying as much on interest as we do on discretionary spending domestically or the military budget. That is no business plan.

How do you think they are going to pay for the debt forgiveness? They are going to borrow the money to do it, to backfill to pay the people who are owed the money.

One other point of clarification. When you had a practical bill—the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which was done before Senator SCOTT and I got here—it was a plan to grow economic activity, a way to pay for it. Had COVID not come along, the CBO was ready to say that it was paying for itself because we were growing the economy at 3 percent. And the \$150 billion per year over 10 years, which is chump change now compared to the \$3 trillion the Democrats have put us in debt over the last year and a half, was growing the economy with zero inflation, raising wages in the toughest spots for those wage earners. We have always tried to do it without borrowing it from our kids and our grandkids.

I yield back the floor to Senator SCOTT.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, so let's remember what we are talking about here. We are not canceling debt; we are transferring debt. We are transferring the debt because this obligation doesn't go away. Somebody still owes this money.

What we are saying is, people who decided—they made the choice—to go to college or go to some higher education, they are not going to have to pay their debt. And people who didn't and already paid off their debt, they are going to pay for it.

My colleague from Massachusetts never acknowledged the example. We all remember when we went out to dinner and we didn't spend the most money and how somebody suggested that, oh, let's just share it. So we paid for the expensive wine, and we paid for the expensive meal. That is not fair.

When you talk to Americans around the country, and they say: Would you like to forgive all the debt? Absolutely. Free is great.

But when you say: You are going to pay for it, they say: Absolutely not. Why would I pay off the debt for somebody else?

Let's remember just what my bill does. It doesn't say we can't forgive student loans; it says that Congress ought to decide if we do it. This is going to cost up to \$1 trillion.

I don't think we ought to, so-called, transfer this debt, but my bill will at least give us a chance to have a debate on it. But that is not what my colleague wants to do.

I hope my colleague understands that her objection is absolutely a slap in the face to all those workers in Massachusetts and around the country who didn't go to college: construction workers, small business owners, chefs, flight attendants, firefighters, landscapers, and so many other groups of people who have made the decision not to pursue a higher education for whatever reason.

There are many others who worked hard to get scholarships or those who worked part time to afford college or plenty others who took the time to pay off their loans. I am going to stand with those people, working-class people—people who are responsible, hard-working Americans who absolutely are willing to pay off their obligations.

I think about people like my dad. My dad had a sixth grade education. He was a truckdriver. He worked his tail off. I can't imagine what he would think about working hard every day, then being forced to pay for some other person's degree as a doctor or a lawyer. He would be beside himself. He would think it was so unfair.

It is not how the real world works. It is a Democrat fantasyland that Joe Biden is trying to turn into reality.

People used to take pride in paying off their debts and working hard to see their commitments come through. Democrats want to destroy that and destroy ideas of fiscal responsibility. They want to forget that we are \$30 trillion in debt. They want to forget that we still have record-high inflation as a result of wasteful spending.

My colleague wants to pretend that we are in this fantasyland because objecting to my bill is an endorsement of Biden's reckless plan and his unconstitutional debt transfer, from the over-achiever, to the Harvard grad, to the working class.

As Members of Congress, we should be interested in checks and balances and the separation of powers. We should guard the powers of the Constitution that is especially reserved for the legislative branch. Spending a trillion dollars with no congressional oversight is wrong. That is not exactly how our Constitution was set up. This shameless decision to block my bill is just another example of how far Senate Democrats will go to appease the radical left.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. So I am still waiting for an answer to the question: Where were these Republicans who were talking about fiscal responsibility and what is fair in terms of transferring costs, when it was the billionaires and the giant corporations who were getting a \$2 trillion tax break?

Let us remember—because I was here when that happened—even the conservative economists and think tanks were saying this is going to go on the debt balance because it is not paid for.

No. At that moment, they were willing to say: But it is going to produce all kinds of wonderful benefits—which, of course, did not come to pass.

What about the example I gave, the example about the investment that we made as a country in our returning veterans; the fact that we invested so 2 million of them could get college diplomas, so that millions more could get technical degrees? What about the fact that the numbers show American taxpayers got a return on that investment of 7 to 1? This really is about who we invest in.

It seems that what Senator SCOTT is saying is people shouldn't go to school. If you are in a family that you can't guarantee that you are going to have some assets to back you up, if you ever have to think about the fact that you might get sick, you might fall down, you might get hurt, and you might not be able to finish, or you might not be able to turn that degree into a high-paying job, or you might graduate at a moment when the economy is in a slump, what Senator SCOTT seems to be saying is: Don't order off that menu. Don't go to school. Don't try to get a post-high school certificate in cosmetology. Don't try to get a certificate for truckdriving school. Don't try to get a 2-year diploma. Don't try to get a 4-year diploma. That is not going to make America a better or richer country. That is not going to be an America that is going to open opportunities.

The next time Senator SCOTT or any other Republican talks to me about fair, I would ask them to explain to me what is fair that the daughter of a janitor a half a century ago could go to a good 4-year college on \$50 a semester? Why? Because American taxpayer invested in those public colleges and universities. And today that opportunity is not there for a single one of our kids.

When you want to talk about who has college debt, instead of talking about the three-tenths of 1 percent of Ivy League grads who have college debt, look at the 68 percent of Florida A&M grads who have college debt. That is shameful. We need to be an America that is about creating more opportunities, not closing them off for tens of millions of people.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, first off, my colleague never addressed

the issue that this is a transfer of obligation. I mean, you can have a conversation about what we should have done with regard to tax cuts in the past, but this is a transfer of obligation. This is a transfer of obligation of people who decided to go to school.

We should do everything we can to help people, but we are not addressing the problem here. I addressed it when I was Governor. When I became Governor in January of 2011, tuition in Florida was going up 15 percent a year, plus inflation. I stopped it. We didn't see tuition increase while I was Governor, and we became the No. 1 higher education system in the country according to U.S. News & World Report.

We solved the problem of the cost of higher education to make sure people could afford education. We did it because we invested, we kept tuition low, and we paid our universities based on three things: do you get a degree, how much money you make, and what does it cost to get a degree. So, guess what, all of our universities became more efficient and more accountable.

That is how you fix the problem. This does not fix the problem. This does nothing to reduce tuition. This does nothing to hold our universities accountable. This does nothing to stop our universities from raising tuition. This does nothing to require our universities to make sure our kids get a job. This does nothing to make sure our kids get good-paying jobs.

So I am very disappointed in my colleague in that she would still not address the issue that that is a complete transfer of obligation from some people who decided to go get a higher education to people who decided not to.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, would the Senator yield for a question?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. I yield the floor.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I want to ask the Senator if he believes that the 68 percent of students at Florida A&M University who have student loan debt should never have gone to college because it turns out their families couldn't afford to pay for college in Florida.

Should they just never have tried?

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Are you finished?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Absolutely. I did everything I could to make sure all of our students had the opportunity to go to school. We made sure that they could afford to go to school.

What I have said in my bill today is this ought to be done by Congress. And let's don't just do some blanket transfer of obligations here. Congress should be doing this. This is going to cost us up to \$1 trillion, and we are going to have people like my dad, if he was still

alive—a truckdriver with a sixth-grade education—pay for some Ivy League kid to go to school, and that is wrong.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, can I ask for a clarification of that answer?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. So, among the 68 percent of Florida A&M students who have student loan debt—I believe I heard the Senator say he made it possible for them to afford college, and I am wondering if he could explain how they could have afforded college without taking on that whole student loan debt.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I am not suggesting you shouldn't borrow money, but what I am suggesting is, if you do borrow money, you made that decision, all right? You shouldn't transfer it to somebody like my dad, who had a sixth-grade education, couldn't afford to go to school, didn't go to school. There shouldn't be a transfer to make sure they pay off your debt. That is a decision you make. You should pay it off.

Now, if you have an issue because you can't pay it, let's deal with that issue. That is not what this does. This says, whatever your issues, Joe Biden says, by himself, without any act of Congress—he gets to make a decision by himself: Poof, your debt goes away; somebody else picks it up. That is not right.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I am really delighted that my colleague from Florida is suddenly concerned about transfers of wealth—I really am—because, as he may or may not know, over the last 30 years, there has been a massive transfer of wealth. The problem is, it has gone in the wrong direction.

We are talking about the shrinking of the middle class. We are talking about trillions of dollars going to the top 1 percent. And we are ending up in a situation today where you have billionaires and you have large corporations that don't pay a nickel in Federal taxes.

I always find it interesting that whenever Congress does something—ever so rarely—that benefits working people and low-income people, there is an uproar: Oh my God, you are helping young people and working people; you are helping poor people. What a terrible thing to do.

But there is massive silence when you give gigantic tax breaks to the 1 percent or large corporations that are now doing phenomenally well.

So my colleague from Florida is interested in the transfer of wealth? Let's work together. Let's make sure that the working class in this country—not just the billionaires—get a fair shake. Let's help young people. Let's start canceling the student debt that we should have done years ago.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, well, first off, let me make sure my colleague from Vermont knows my background. I actually grew up in public housing, born to a single mom. I do care about people, making sure you can get an education. That is why I did exactly what I did in Florida. I made sure people had the opportunity to get ahead.

The 4 years before I became Governor of Florida, the State lost 832,000 jobs. By cutting taxes and reducing the regulations and streamlining things, we added 1.7 million jobs so people all over my State could get a job. That is how people get ahead. You don't get ahead by just somebody transferring obligations from one person to somebody else. That improves a few people's lives, but that is completely unfair. That is not how this country was set up, that some people are going to pay for somebody else's obligation that they decided to pick up, and that is all I am talking about.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, you know, I really do think about this transfer question, and I find myself asking: Who paid for Jeff Bezos's yacht? Is it the taxpayers who said: Now, we—America's middle class, America's working class—are actually going to have to pick up the slack. And they will be the ones who have to pay to keep the military. They are the ones who will have to pay for roads and bridges. They are the ones who will pay for investment in science. But the billionaires can get richer and richer and richer and pay little or nothing in taxes. That is a giant transfer, and yet none of our Republican colleagues seem interested in talking about that transfer and just putting a stop to the outflow from hard-working, middle-class families over to the billionaires and the giant corporations.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I think who paid for Jeff Bezos's yacht is all the people who bought packages from Amazon. And by the way, if you do get one that says "Made in China," I hope everybody will send it back.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S.J. RES. 61

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, in a few minutes, I am going to ask unanimous consent for the passage of the bill. In the interim, I would like to yield some time to my good friend Senator WICKER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, I seek recognition to speak on the same matter that Senator BURR has raised and will raise on the unanimous consent request.

Think of the economy right now, Mr. President. Inflation is at 8.3 percent or higher, our GDP is shrinking, and supply chains have not recovered from the pandemic. The last thing we need is a shutdown of this Nation's rail service, both passenger and freight. Yet that is what we are facing in less than a day and a half from this moment: a massive rail strike that will virtually shut down our economy.

Now, this didn't have to happen, but I will tell you, it has been going on since 2019. So we are in our third year of this matter. There has been negotiation among the rails, some 37 companies—including 7 major freight carriers—and 12 unions. They reached an impasse. So, pursuant to statute, the President of the United States, President Joe Biden, appointed a PEB, a Presidential Emergency Board, to help resolve this issue. They brought the parties together and have worked with the suggestions from both sides—both labor and management—and come up with their recommendation, which the President of the United States has endorsed in full.

We are now at the point where we are asking both labor and management to agree to this recommendation of the PEB. One hundred percent of management has agreed to this recommendation of the Biden-appointed Presidential Emergency Board. Of the 12 unions, 8 of the unions have agreed. So we have an overwhelming majority of the unions agreeing to this and 100 percent of management agreeing to it, but under the law that Congress, in its wisdom, passed years and years ago, we have to have 100 percent of the 12 unions, and there are 4 holdouts at this point.

Pursuant to the statute, when we get to a situation like this, Congress can step in, and that is what my friend is going to ask us to do in just a few minutes. Congress can pass the recommendation of the PEB in full. The Senate can pass it, send it over to the House, send it to the President, who has endorsed the recommendation in full, and we can avoid this strike. And that is what we ought to be doing.

So I want to commend my friend from North Carolina for his leadership in this case. If the trains stop running, our economy grinds to a halt. And that is the very reason this law is in place, and it is the very reason why it is incumbent on us as Senators and Representatives to pass a resolution implementing the PEB.

I yield to my friend.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Mississippi.

There are going to be some who say this is unprecedented by the Congress. In fact, under the Railway Labor Act, Congress is allowed to intervene. In fact, Congress has intervened 18 times in the past, imposing PEB recommendations in whole or in part 4 times.

If we don't do it, if we do not force this issue, at 12:01 tomorrow night, the railroads will shut down, and the economic impact on the American people is \$2 billion a day—\$2 billion.

The Senator from Mississippi and I have introduced a bill that will adopt the Biden administration recommendations—recommendations that include a 24-percent increase in pay, paid retroactively to 2020; annual bonuses of \$1,000; and additional paid leave. This is what has been negotiated by the PEB board, but, as Senator WICKER said, there are holdouts from a standpoint of some of the major unions even though eight have agreed to it.

Now, as I said, Congress has taken this action 18 times to intervene in 12 different rail disputes. It spans back to 1982, and the latest was in 1991. So I dare say there are only a few that are in this body who were here when that happened.

Now, Senator SANDERS is on the floor, and I know he is going to object. I know he is going to object because I read his tweet this week. It said this:

Congress shouldn't stand in the way of railroad workers going on strike. The rail companies have avoided bargaining, abused their workers, and allied with the same forces who killed the Biden agenda in 2021. Now they want Congress to support their greed. Don't.

It sounds similar to the argument he was just making to Senator SCOTT about student loans. It sounds very similar to every argument he uses. It is that there is this thing in America where nobody is speaking up for something.

Listen, this is the President's bipartisan emergency Board that he set up that came back with a recommendation to the Biden administration and said: Here is the solution to this. It should be adopted.

This is really weird that Senator WICKER and I were on the floor introducing legislation that supports the President's position and supports the position of the Presidential Emergency Board.

Now, here is the key thing. This is the takeaway. We don't have to be here. Senator SCHUMER at any point can place this legislation on the floor. Clearly, Senator SANDERS would object then. But let me make a promise. If Senator SCHUMER needs votes, I can deliver 48 Republican votes to implement the PEB recommendation and the Biden-endorsed position.

Let me say that again because I want to make sure Senator SCHUMER's staff understands. This is about how you get to 60. I don't want to give a 101 of the U.S. Senate, but 60 votes, as the President knows, is required. I am offering him 48. He only needs to get 12 on his side to have 60 votes, take this up, pass it, to have this over with. And there is no interruption.

Not only is it \$2 billion a day in economic impact; this is 160,000 trainloads of agricultural product at a time of harvest to cross this country.

There are some who say: Well, this isn't going to affect me. They haul coal. They haul gas. They haul petroleum. They haul gases like helium that are required for manufacturing businesses. They haul auto parts, which means you are going to see auto assembly plants that shut down not because of China but because we let the railroad workers go on strike and did not support the President's position.

This is not political. This is Republicans supporting the President's position and only asking 12 Democrats to support this action.

I ask my colleagues: Drop this concern that you are representing one side or the other. Ask yourself what is best for America.

We just got a report that inflation is 8.3—8.3; food up 7; housing up 6; gasoline was down, and I think everybody expected inflation numbers to go way down. So 8.3 percent—wages aren't keeping up with that.

Every American family is losing money every month. And now you are going to tell them you are going to be paying more because food is going to be scarce. Commodities are going to be scarce. Some things aren't going to be delivered.

If we thought that the port chaos that we saw last year was bad, we are going to see a complete shutdown of rail, and we are just a matter of months away from Christmas, when most retailers are counting on that product to come in.

There are ports like Seattle and L.A., what are they going to do with the containers? You talk about ships staying out at ocean. Amtrak canceled their east-west rail coverage today going forward. Carriers have already stopped hauling hazardous waste because they didn't want to get halfway down a line and not be able to secure the hazardous waste.

We are at a real tipping point on this. And this can all be solved by either no objection to the unanimous consent request or by Senator SCHUMER bringing this to the floor, knowing that he has 48 Republicans, and he only needs to produce 12 to get to 60. This is a really easy thing. It is an easy lift.

Well, my hope is that we will take one of the two paths. But do understand that in less than 48 hours, at 12:01 Friday morning, the likelihood is that without action by Congress, there will be a strike, and rail traffic will stop. Period, end of sentence.

At this time, Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions be discharged from further consideration of S.J. Res. 61 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the joint resolution be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SANDERS. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. And I will object. Let me thank Senator BURR for actually reading my tweets. Much appreciated.

Just a correction of the record. I think Senator WICKER mentioned before that a number of unions had approved this agreement. As I think everybody knows, there cannot be an approval of a union agreement unless the workers themselves vote on it. They have not voted on it. So, in fact, there has been no approval by any union of the agreement. But before I go to the rail situation, I did want to say a few words and put this issue into a broader context, and then I will get to the rail situation.

As I think most Americans know, today we have more income and wealth inequality than at any time in the history of our country. People on top are doing phenomenally well while working people are struggling to keep their heads above water.

During the pandemic, while essential workers, like those employed at the railroads—while these people put their lives on the line and died by the thousands, the billionaire class—the people on top—saw a \$2 trillion increase in their wealth. Workers died by the tens of thousands. People on top became much richer.

Further, as healthcare costs soar, we have over 70 million Americans who are either uninsured or underinsured, and, in addition, the United States remains the only major country on Earth not to guarantee paid family and medical leave. That is the broad issue that we have got to look at as we look at the situation in the rail industry.

As I understand it, it is not accurate to say that the President of the United States has agreed to what the PEB has come up with. They have come up with a proposal. But right now, as we speak, Labor Secretary Marty Walsh is currently meeting with the rail union's end management in trying to forge an agreement. And I happen to wish them well. And I hope that those meetings lead to an agreement that is fair and that is just.

But let us make no mistake about what is happening in the rail industry right now—and I did not hear one word of that from my Republican colleagues—and that is that the rail industry has seen huge profits in recent years and last year alone made a record-breaking \$20 billion in profit. Last year, the rail industry made \$20 billion in profit.

And let me also mention that the CEOs of many of these rail companies are enjoying huge compensation packages. For example, last year, the CEO of CSX made over 20 million in total compensation while the CEOs of Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern made over \$14 million each in total compensation.

In other words, what is happening in the rail industry is what is happening all over this country. Corporate profits

are soaring, and CEOs are making incredibly large compensation packages.

I would also add that the parent company of BNSF—one of the largest freight rail companies in America—is Berkshire Hathaway, owned by Warren Buffett. Mr. Buffett is the fourth wealthiest man in America, worth nearly \$100 billion. During the pandemic, as railworkers risked their lives to keep the economy going, Mr. Buffett became \$33 billion richer.

In the midst of all of those profit increases for the industry, in the midst of huge compensation packages for the CEOs of the industry, in the midst of increased wealth for those who own these companies, what is going on for the workers? I think that is a fair question to ask, if we are in the midst of negotiations. What is going on for the workers? How are they doing?

It turns out that the key issue in the current negotiations is not about salaries. Apparently, there is an agreement on that. The key issue that is being contested is about the working conditions in the industry which are absolutely unacceptable and are almost beyond belief.

Right now, if you work in the freight rail industry—one of the most grueling and dangerous jobs in America—you are entitled to a grand total of zero sick days.

In case you missed it, let me repeat it: You are entitled to zero sick days.

What that means is that if you as a worker get sick, if your child gets sick, if your spouse gets sick and you need to take time off of work, not only will you not get paid, you actually could get fired. And that is precisely what is happening today in the rail industry. How crazy is that?

Let me remind you of what you undoubtedly know, that hundreds of Americans are still dying every day from COVID and tens of thousands are being hospitalized as a result of this deadly virus. What the freight rail industry is saying to its workers is this: It doesn't matter if you have COVID. It doesn't matter if you are lying in a hospital bed because of a medical emergency. It doesn't matter if your wife just gave birth to your child. It doesn't matter. If you do not come into work, no matter what the reason, we in the industry, we the bosses, have the right to fire you.

Really? Do these conditions really exist in the United States of America, the wealthiest country on Earth in the year 2022?

I do wonder if the CEO of the railroad or other top executives at that railroad—I wonder if they would get fired if they got sick or if they had a medical emergency in their families. I doubt very much that they would get fired.

Further, I should add, that quite sensibly the Federal Government guarantees 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave to its workers. That is what we do as a Federal Government. So if you are an employee at the Department of Transportation in the United



States, sitting behind a desk, you are, appropriately—I believe in this very much—guaranteed 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave. That is if you work at the Department of Transportation. But if you are an engineer running a train with tons of freight behind you—a very dangerous job—you get zero sick leave.

Now, that may make sense to somebody, but it doesn't make sense to me. As a result of this reactionary policy of denying workers sick time, rail conductors, engineers, and other rail employees are coming into work sick and exhausted, which is a danger not only to themselves but to their coworkers and everyone else who is around them.

As part of the contract negotiations, the railworkers are asking for 15 paid sick days. This is not a radical idea. We are the only major country on Earth that does not guarantee paid sick days.

In Germany, workers are entitled to 84 weeks of paid sick leave at 70 percent of their salary. In Norway, workers are entitled to 1 year of paid sick leave at 100 percent of their salary. In the UK, workers are entitled up to 28 weeks of paid sick leave.

The railworkers in the United States are not asking for 1 year of paid sick leave. They are not asking for 6 months of paid sick leave. They are asking for 15 days—15 days. The rail industry has said, as I understand it, that they just cannot afford to do that, just don't have the money. They say it would cost too much money to provide their workers with any paid sick days. They just can't afford to do it. Well, let's see. They made over \$20 billion in profits last year, and they provide their CEOs with huge compensation packages.

And here is something else that everyone should know who is getting involved in this issue: Last year, the rail industry spent over \$18 billion, not to improve rail safety, not to address the supply chain crisis in America, but to buy back its own stock and hand out huge dividends to its wealthy stockholders. In fact, since 2010, the rail industry has spent over \$183 billion on stock buybacks and dividends.

So here is where we are. It turns out that guaranteeing 15 paid sick days to rail workers would cost the industry a grand total of \$688 million a year. That is less than 3.5 percent of their annual profits. It seems to me if four major rail carriers can afford to spend over \$18 billion a year on stock buybacks and dividends, please, please don't tell me they cannot afford to guarantee 15 paid sick days to their workers and allow these workers to have a reasonable quality of life, which they don't enjoy today.

If the Burr-Wicker resolution passed, railworkers would be entitled to zero paid sick days and zero unpaid sick days. That is clearly unacceptable.

The outrage over the lack of paid sick leave is not the only issue being negotiated. The railworkers of this country are sick and tired of unreliable

scheduling, which is having a horrendous impact on their personal and family lives. In America today, railworkers are on call for up to 14 consecutive days, 12 hours a day. In fact, it is not uncommon for many railworkers to be on call virtually 24 hours a day with the requirement to report to work within 90 minutes for shifts that can last nearly 80 hours.

My office has heard from railworkers who received calls from management at 2 in the morning requiring them to show up for work at 4 a.m. Again, this is not only unacceptable; it is dangerous, and it has led to a substantial increase in the rate of injuries in the freight rail industry.

If the Burr-Wicker resolution were to pass, these unfair and unsafe working conditions would be allowed to continue, threatening the safety not only of the workers, but of passengers, as well.

Finally, the Burr-Wicker resolution could allow the freight rail industry to substantially increase the cost workers would have to pay for healthcare.

Let us be clear. We are talking about an industry that not only made \$20 billion in profits last year and spent over \$18 billion on stock buybacks and dividends, we are talking about an industry that has slashed its workforce by nearly 30 percent over the last 6 years, leaving its remaining workforce woefully understaffed and overworked. We are talking about an industry that has seen its profit margins nearly triple over the past 20 years.

Today, what Congress should be doing is not passing the Burr-Wicker resolution and forcing railroad workers back to work under horrendous working conditions. What we should be doing is telling the CEOs in the rail industry: Treat your workers with dignity and respect, not contempt. Do not fire workers for the "crime" of going to a doctor when they are sick. Make sure that your workers have 15 paid sick days and adequate time off to rest and spend with their families. At a time when you, the industry, are making recordbreaking profits, do not increase the cost of healthcare for your employees.

The CEOs in the freight rail industry need to understand that they cannot have it all. The rail industry must agree to a contract that is fair and that is just, and if they are not prepared to do that, it is time for Congress to stand on the side of workers for a change and not just the head of large multinational corporations.

Railworkers have a right to strike for reliable schedules. They have a right to strike for paid sick days. They have a right to strike for safe working conditions. Railworkers have a right to strike for these benefits. The Burr-Wicker resolution would take these fundamental rights away from workers. We cannot allow that to happen. Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). Objection is heard.

The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, the objection has been heard and the Senator from Vermont has that right.

I wonder if the Senator would yield for a question concerning some assertions that he has made. It is my understanding—and the Senator is correct in this regard—only two of the unions have actually voted in favor of this plan. Six others have—their leadership has agreed, and we have tentative agreements with six of those. So six plus the two is the eight I mentioned.

Also, the Senator, I think, is mistaken in saying that there is no sick leave policy. That would be unbelievable for the rail industry in this day and age. It works a little differently for the rail. Railroad employees operate trains and have a leave policy under which they first indicate unavailability for work, and when that unavailability is the result of illness, then they receive sick pay through a sickness benefit under a statutory scheme.

The Presidential Emergency Board heard arguments on both sides, recommended an additional paid leave day. And, again, I would stress that this comes on top of a 24-percent wage increase.

But the thing that really strikes me about what my friend from Vermont said is he seems to cast doubt on whether President Biden is actually for this PEB recommendation, and that needs to be cleared up. If the Senator from Vermont is suggesting that President Biden is not behind this, then the White House needs to let us know immediately because when the PEB report was issued, the clear message from the White House is that President Biden was in favor of this and endorses this.

So if there are people in the White House listening to this, if the President of the United States is following this debate, then he needs to clarify this. If he is backing out on his support for the PEB, we need to know that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. My understanding, I say to my colleague from Mississippi, is that as we speak, the Secretary of Labor is in a room—or has been today, with management and labor in trying to forge an agreement. So what is going on right now is they are trying to reach an agreement which is amenable to both sides, so that is a work in process.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Madam President, it is clearly apparent by listening to this debate, if Senator SANDERS had been on the PEB board, the PEB board wouldn't be making a recommendation and the President wouldn't be behind it. But that is where we are, short of a breakthrough in the negotiations that are occurring and going on.

I grew up listening to Paul Harvey. Paul Harvey had a show, the rest of the

news, the stuff you didn't hear. Let me do Paul Harvey on Senator SANDERS.

The railroad workers today get 3 weeks paid leave on average, plus 11 paid vacation days. PEB made a recommendation that they get 1 additional paid leave day. We will add that in. That is almost a month of paid leave. Regardless of what you call it, there is a month there.

You now mentioned this wasn't as lucrative as Germany and UK. I was home all of August. Nobody was asking: Geez, can you pass legislation that makes us look more like the UK or Germany or the rest of Europe? And I would be willing to bet that 27 paid leave days probably is more than some of the European countries.

Mr. SANDERS. Would you like to bet on that?

Mr. BURR. I will turn to you when I finish, how about that? I gave you a gracious amount of time.

The PEB board determined this was a good solution. And Senator SANDERS says he is here looking out for the middle class because nobody does that. Tell me this: How are you looking out for the middle class when you are risking losing \$2 billion a day in economic activity? Some of those people that you are talking about standing up for, if this rail strike continues, they are going to lose their job because of you. They are going to lose their job because the President took a position and you didn't support him.

I have been amazed with this administration. I find it pretty difficult sitting up here taking the President's position because the CDC today, 78 percent of the CDC workforce does not show up at the office more than 2 days a month. We are in the middle of COVID. We have a monkeypox national medical emergency, and 78 percent of CDC employees—Centers for Disease Control—do not go to the office in Atlanta. As a matter of fact, by, I think, the New York Times report, even the Secretary doesn't go into the office. At a time where you ought to have leadership, the leadership is gone.

Let's give the President a little bit of credit. He is showing some leadership. He realizes this is not good for every American. It doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor or in the middle. Having \$2 billion a day of negative economic impact is not good. It will ruin people's lives, just like COVID, just like monkeypox has done to some Americans.

I am not sure how in good conscience you can roll the dice and say: Boy, 24-percent increase in pay retroactive to 2020—not 2022, 2020—\$1,000 bonus, and 27 paid leave days per year, somehow we are cheating them. It is beyond me.

But an objection has been heard, and now it means this is in Senator SCHUMER's hands. He is the majority leader. He can bring this legislation up on the floor. All he needs is 60 votes because I am convinced, after hearing Senator SANDERS, he is not going to have an epiphany tonight and wake up tomorrow and say: I was wrong, I am for this.

But here is the promise I will make to Senator SCHUMER. If he will bring it to the floor, I will produce 48 Republican votes for it. That means Democrats only need to produce 12 people to support it to keep the American people from having a \$2 billion-a-day economic impact negatively impacting them. It will keep the flow of goods from the east coast to the west coast, and Amtrak will open up again. Christmas that comes in from overseas will hit L.A., Seattle, everywhere, and it will make it to its retail location where my wife can buy it. You could probably squeeze 12 Democratic votes just out of coastal communities that have ports that are going to be the real loser in this.

Remember, not long ago we had a port problem. We had ships that were sitting off L.A. that couldn't unload, and we felt the impact of it. Well, if you thought that was bad, wait until there are no trains because then they will be unloading no ships. They are all going to sit off the shore. When they back up like that, that backs up further and further when these goods are going to come in because once they unload here, they are going to go back and get more.

It also means that what we export in this country, there are no containers and no ships coming in to export those goods. If you are in agricultural territory at harvest time, this is going to be devastating to you. There are 160 million freight cars of agriculture transported every year, and it happens in this period.

So I say to my colleagues, let's all hope that Senator SCHUMER will bring this up, that he will take Republicans up on their position of supporting the President and a solution to this problem, and that all he needs to do is produce 12 folks, and at any point, we can pass this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. I was not aware Senator BURR was a railroad worker, so let me, just to set the record straight, tell you what the railroad workers themselves understand the situation is. We might want to listen to those who live the experience. So let me very briefly quote you a statement from Jeremy Ferguson, president of SMART Transportation Division, and Dennis Pierce, president, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Teamsters Rail Conference.

This is what they say about their working conditions:

Penalizing engineers and conductors for getting sick or going to a doctor's visit with termination must be stopped as part of this contract settlement. Let us repeat that, our members are being terminated for getting sick or for attending routine medical visits as we crawl our way out of a worldwide pandemic. No working-class American should be treated with this level of harassment in the workplace for simply becoming ill or going to a routine medical visit.

That is from the unions themselves.

So let us be clear. I don't think anybody wants a strike or wants a lockout. We hope that a settlement will be reached in the next day. But, in my view, if we are going to reach a settlement, I would hope that the railroads, which are making huge profits, start treating their workers with the respect that they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I appreciate the debate on this. Here is where we are on this issue. We are going to have a nationwide strike within a day and a half from now, midnight, 12:01 a.m., Friday.

There are two things that could stop this. The distinguished majority leader can bring this PEB recommendation to the floor, and we will produce the Republican votes to get President Biden's administration's recommendation enacted. Send it to the House. The other thing that can happen is for President Biden to do as I have called on him to do just a few moments ago—to make it clear that this is, in fact, his recommendation, his endorsement of the plan that has been put forward by the Board he appointed; make that clear and exercise the Presidential leadership that is needed at this point to persuade his friends and the four holdout unions that this is what needs to be done.

But that is where we are. If we don't have one of those two actions, then we will have done nothing, and we will see a strike and the economic devastation that the distinguished Senator from North Carolina has described. It is really up to the Democratic leader and the President of the United States.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I am very pleased to be on the floor today with my colleague Senator HIRONO to express our strong support for the nomination of Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta to be Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues at the Department of State.

The position that Dr. Gupta has been nominated for leads the Office of Global Women's Issues, which is charged with advancing the rights and empowerment of women and girls around the world through U.S. foreign policy, so looking at our foreign policy through a gender lens that recognizes that women are half of the world's population.

Not only does the Office of Global Women's Issues prioritize policies and programs to advance the status of women around the world, it ensures that U.S. policies incorporate a gender lens at all levels of policy and decision making.

The last 2½ years of the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated why this office is more important than ever before. Around the world over those last