

being conducted by our Federal research Agencies and at our world-class research universities.

We must be prepared for future pandemics, especially as climate change accelerates the transmission of deadly diseases.

In the last few months, we have seen H5N1 bird flu transmitted from dairy cattle to humans. This resolution could block researchers from understanding the mutations that allow bird flu to infect humans, effectively banning us from preventing outbreaks and protecting farm workers.

Medical research is an issue of national security. Stronger research means stronger security. This resolution would not prepare us for emerging disease threats, and it would not make our Nation safer. Bowing to political pressure to promote a research ban without understanding the implications on research, biosecurity, biosafety, or public health is dangerous, and it is reckless.

Investments in biomedical research are investments in hope and health and safety that serve our country today and into the future. For those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, certainly I understand the Senator from Massachusetts' comments and his concerns. I would still continue to argue that the benefits have not outweighed the risk. We have not seen any benefits from this type of research.

The whole concept, just going back to what the definition of "viral gain-of-function research" is—we wouldn't do it if it is causing potential for harm, but we can still continue to research flu vaccines. We can continue to research avian influenza. There are all sorts of things we could do. But let's not make avian influenza worse. Let's not put a protein spike on it that is going to make it stick to human lung cells like they did with SARS-CoV-1.

The justification of gain-of-function research hinges on its purported benefits, as you described, such as improved preparedness for pandemics; however, it is important to scrutinize whether these benefits are indeed reliable and they outweigh the risks.

Critics argue that the knowledge gained from such research can often be obtained through safer means, such as computational models or studying natural outbreaks. Moreover, these resources invested in high-risk research can be redirected toward strengthening public health infrastructure, improving our surveillance system, and developing broad-spectrum antivirals and vaccines.

Let's quit throwing good money after bad money. Let's take good care of the American taxpayer dollars and actually do things that are going to protect them from future pandemics.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 2494

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, under President Biden, nearly 10 million illegal immigrants have entered our country. Now, among those 10 million are an unknown number of dangerous individuals.

We know that hundreds of individuals appear on the Terrorism Watchlist. We know that a significant number of transnational cartel members are in this population. Other categories include drug smugglers, human traffickers, and many more.

It is a laundry list of bad actors who have no business stepping foot in our country. And, sadly, it is not a surprise, when we allow over half a million illegal immigrants with criminal records into the homeland, that they commit crimes against American citizens.

Even members of law enforcement—the very people entrusted with keeping us safe—are now on the frontlines of the border crisis. And, no, I am not talking about police in border States like Texas or Arizona; I am talking about North Carolina—my State. I am talking about New York City.

Two years ago, in my home State of North Carolina, Wake County Deputy Sheriff Ned Byrd was killed in the line of duty by an illegal alien gang member who crossed the border under President Biden. And just this week, in Queens, NY, NYPD officers were shot while trying to apprehend a suspect in a string of robberies. One was shot in the stomach, and the other was shot in the leg.

Now, thankfully, they are going to survive. Our prayers are with them and their families, and we are grateful for their service to our country. But the suspect was identified as a 19-year-old from Venezuela who crossed the border illegally through Eagle Pass, TX, in July of last year. Worse yet, he was caught, and then he was released with a court date that he, predictably, ignored.

So enough is enough. I am back here on the Senate floor to, once again, try and pass a bill called the POLICE Act. It is a straightforward bill. The POLICE Act simply states that an alien can be deported for assaulting a police officer, a firefighter, or another first responder. This bill has already passed the House, and it can be sent to the President's desk by passing it right here today. Pretty simple.

But now the last time I tried to pass this bill, the Senator from Connecticut blocked it, and he called it nothing. That is 100 percent wrong. Specifically, the POLICE Act amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to explicitly state that an illegal immigrant may be deported for assaulting a police officer.

Now, it is important to point out that the current law does not cover all assaults against law enforcement. That means that some immigrants can remain in the country even after committing assaults against cops.

And we know that under the Biden administration, that is a very real pos-

sibility, unfortunately. But the truth is that we cannot trust this administration to do the right thing or enforce the law and to keep our communities safe. That is why we need to pass the POLICE Act today.

Any Senator who claims to "back the blue" should have no problem at all supporting this bill. So I sincerely hope that in the face of yet another attack on police officers, that we can pass this bill today.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2494 and 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 Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, the Border Patrol union—our law enforcement officers who patrol the southern and northern border who serve this country and protect this country—endorsed the bipartisan border security bill that my friend from North Carolina opposed, as did almost all of his colleagues.

The Border Patrol union—the organization that represents law enforcement officers—supported that bill for a number of reasons. It would have surged resources to the southern border to make sure that we properly administered our border and made sure that the only people who are coming to this country have legitimate asylum claims. It would invest in technology to make those Border Patrol officers' jobs easier. It would have granted new hiring authorities to make sure that we can get people down to the border faster rather than just redeploying agents from the northern border to the southern border.

But it is likely that they supported that bill for an additional reason. Under current law, if you are coming to this country to apply for asylum, if you have a criminal history in the United States during a prior visit or in your home country, that question is not relevant under existing law until you go before an asylum judge, before you go before an immigration judge to make your asylum claim.

Senator LANKFORD, myself, and Senator SINEMA thought that didn't make sense. We thought that that question of your prior criminal history should be relevant the minute that you show up at the border; that you don't get into the United States to make your claim of asylum if you have a criminal history.

That was part of the bipartisan border bill. That would have protected the country. That would have protected our law enforcement officers. But my Republican colleagues turned down the opportunity to pass bipartisan legislation that would prevent individuals

with criminal records from coming into the country and applying for asylum because under current law—law that the President is bound to administer and enforce—those questions are not brought into the process until that asylum claim is being heard by a judge.

And so it is just another example of the ways in which the bipartisan border bill—the bill that Republicans asked for, demanded Democrats negotiate—would have made this country safer, would have created a more efficient and more secure border. And I am still furious—and heartbroken—that Republicans decided to keep the border a mess because it helps their Presidential candidate politically instead of trying to solve the problem.

As for this specific measure, as I said last time I came to the floor to object, it is already, under current law, a deportable offense if you commit a crime of violence. It is already, under current law, a deportable offense if you commit and are convicted of any crime involving moral turpitude. And, further, non-citizens who are convicted of any aggravated felony, including misdemeanor offenses, are deportable as well.

So this bill is seeking to solve a problem that doesn't exist because current law says, if you commit an assault on a law enforcement officer, you are going to be deported.

So why are we debating this bill if current law already says you can be deported for assaulting a police officer?

I don't know the answer, but what I know is that there is a broader effort underfoot by former President Trump and my Republican colleagues to try to make Americans believe that there is a specific unique threat posed to you by immigrants; that you should fear people that are coming to this country to seek a better life or to flee terror or torture. It is a familiar trope because it was used against my forefathers when they came here from Ireland. It was used against those who came to the United States from prior generations: You should fear the Irish. You should fear the Italians. You should fear the Chinese. Today, it is that you should fear those coming from Central or South America.

But it is just not the truth. I know it is hard to hear for some folks who believe everything they watch on FOX News, but individuals who are first-generation immigrants to this country are less likely to be convicted of violent crimes than individuals who are born in this country.

In 2020, the Trump DOJ sought to prove that false. They actually commissioned research to examine the rate of crime between noncitizens and citizens because they couldn't believe the data because FOX News said that we should fear immigrants.

Here is one of the papers that was commissioned by the Trump DOJ:

[W]e find that undocumented immigrants had substantially lower crime rates than native-born citizens . . . across a range of fel-

ony offenses. Relative to undocumented immigrants, US-born citizens are over 2 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over 4 times more likely to be arrested for property crimes.

These are quotes directly from a Trump-funded Department of Justice report.

I don't disagree with my colleague from North Carolina. Of course, if someone commits an assault against a law enforcement officer, they should be deported from this country. If somebody commits an assault against a community member, regardless of their occupation, they should be deported from this country. That is what the existing law says: If you are convicted of a felony or a misdemeanor assault—any crime of moral turpitude—you are deported.

And so, to me, this is duplicative at best and, at worst, an effort to just try to reinforce this very dangerous mythology that this country has something to fear from immigrants who are coming to this country to flee economic desperation and violence and terror and torture.

For that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, I appreciate my colleague's comments, and I believe them to be sincere. But let's not get lost in the swirl of eloquence here.

I believe my colleague once said that illegal immigrants are "undocumented Americans"—a direct quote—and that they are "the people we care about most"—another direct quote—but I would submit that if you illegally enter the United States and then beat up a police officer, you are most certainly not an American. And the only thing we should care about is that you are deported.

Now, he said these laws can lead to deportation, but it is not necessary that they do particularly under this administration.

I refer to my prior remarks: There have been a half million illegal immigrants—a half million—with criminal records that have come into the homeland, again, illegally. And it is no surprise that they can commit crimes against Americans.

So this bill, which he seems to support—I am a little confused at the language. It seems like he might support this unanimous consent effort here because it is important because the current law does not cover all assaults against law enforcement. Deporting an illegal alien who assaults a law enforcement officer requires a complex legal analysis to prove that the illegal alien committed an aggravated felony or crime involving moral turpitude.

It is not guaranteed that this process will even lead to deportation. So the POLICE Act creates a simple, straightforward, commonsense rule that says illegal aliens who assault cops are deportable—period, end of story.

We saw it in North Carolina. We have recently seen it in New York City. And it can happen in a community near you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Vermont.

RIGHT TO CONTRACEPTION ACT

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, we have had a dismal history recently with the U.S. Supreme Court. In my view, it has totally failed the American people.

In the name of States' rights, the Supreme Court has taken away freedom and caused distress and uncertainty for women and individuals across the country. It is outrageous that, because of this Court and this decision, people have fewer rights today than they did 50 years ago. Of course, I refer to the Dobbs decision, in which the Supreme Court—to its everlasting shame and in its infamy—took away a constitutional right.

It should be noted that, in a post-Dobbs world, women are leaning on contraceptive care more, and doctors see more demand. That now is threatened. For anyone who read that Dobbs decision and the Thomas concurrence in that decision, he laid it out where he at least intends to go.

There seems to be some confusion among my colleagues across the aisle about what this bill is and how important reproductive healthcare is, and I thank the Presiding Officer for his leadership on this with our colleague from Hawaii.

It is very important as everyone needs access both to whatever birth control options make the most sense to them and access to whatever preventive healthcare makes sense to them. Contraceptives can help prevent and treat medical conditions. This is about ensuring that every person in every ZIP Code has access to the birth control that they need if they need it.

This is the right of women and every individual to make decisions about their bodies and their futures. Politicians should not be involved. The Court shouldn't even be intimating it is threatening to take that away, and this legislation is needed to guarantee that they won't.

After Roe was overturned in June 2022, Vermont voters went to the polls. They took their own liberty into their own hands after not being able to rely on the U.S. Supreme Court to protect it. In article 22 of the Vermont Constitution—a new amendment—it permanently protects reproductive liberties.

It says:

That an individual's right to personal reproductive autonomy is central to the liberty and dignity to determine one's own life course and shall not be denied or infringed unless justified by a compelling State interest achieved by the least restrictive means.

This would stop future anti-choice legislation from advancing in our State of Vermont.

We enacted comprehensive legislation in 2019 in Vermont, under a Republican Governor, that would "recognize