

Trump and his ridiculous claims or work with both parties to spare the American people from a Republican shutdown.

And just a parenthetical note: How does anyone expect Donald Trump to be a President when he has such little understanding of the legislative process? He is daring the Congress to shut down. I remember he did that with Leader PELOSI and I in his office a while back. It didn't work out too well for him. Our Republican colleagues should not blindly follow Donald Trump. He doesn't know what he is doing. He doesn't have a plan, and, frankly, he doesn't know what he is talking about.

PROJECT 2025

Mr. President, now on Project 2025, later today, Senate Democrats will hold a press conference to expose Donald Trump's Project 2025 for what it actually is. Project 2025—Trump's Project 2025—is the most harmful, most unhinged, and most extreme conservative agenda in recent American history.

By now, many Americans have heard about Project 2025. And the more people learn about Trump's plan, the more they realize how disastrous it would be for our country.

I could speak about Project 2025 every morning for the remainder of the work period and still not have enough time to cover all of the nasty things hiding inside this agenda.

For middle-class families, Project 2025 will raise taxes by \$3,000. And it caters to the ultrawealthy by giving people who earn more than \$10 million a \$1.5 million tax break.

For workers, Project 2025 will undermine overtime pay, resulting in less pay for longer hours for middle-class Americans who work hard and often have to work more than 40 hours a week. As many as 4.3 million Americans will have their overtime and wage protections erode.

For our national security, Project 2025 will make us less safe by gutting Agencies charged with protecting Americans at home and around the world.

And for our border security, Project 2025 rejects the bipartisan plan we released earlier this year, the strongest bipartisan border security measure in decades. It also adopts a policy of utterly cruel mass deportations with little to no due process and even risks deporting 3 million Dreamers.

How cruel; deport 3 million Dreamers? It is in Project 2025.

And finally, Project 2025 will weaken our democracy by opening the floodgates to foreign interference and big money in politics.

And if all of that isn't enough, just yesterday, Donald Trump's running mate actually proposed going back to the days when having a preexisting condition meant you pay far more for your health insurance.

That is right. Under the Trump-Vance plan, anyone with a chronic con-

dition—or an estimated 129 million Americans—could face outrageously expensive healthcare costs.

This is all beyond sinister stuff. And while Donald Trump tries to run away from Project 2025, here is the simple truth: Donald Trump owns Project 2025 and every single one of its proposals.

Project 2025 has been led by hundreds of former Trump administration officials, chomping at the bit to get back in government and impose their horrible plans. Some of these sections were written by Trump's own Cabinet officials. And Trump himself said in his speech that the Heritage Foundation—which houses Project 2025—would “lay the groundwork and detail plans for exactly what our moment will do.”

Let me say that again. This is Donald Trump talking about the Heritage Foundation, which has created Project 2025. It would “lay the groundwork and detail plans for exactly what our moment will do.”

And the head of the Heritage Foundation said earlier this year that his goal was “institutionalizing Trumpism,” including with Project 2025.

Let me say it again: “Institutionalizing Trumpism.”

Whom are these guys fooling? Now, of course, even Trump himself is backing off, with all the criticism, because it is so far away. These rightwing ideologues want to steer America over the cliff and hurt just about every average American. And then when it becomes public what they want to do—when the public learns more of what they want to do—they try to say: Oh, well, we really didn't mean it. But we know they did.

Watch out, America. Watch out for Project 2025. It will hurt you; it will hurt your family; and it will be implemented by Donald Trump and his rightwing coterie if he gets elected.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. President, Hispanic Heritage Month. Finally, I would like to wish my colleagues and Americans everywhere a happy Hispanic Heritage Month, which began on September 15.

Hispanic Heritage Month crystalizes perfectly why we live in an amazing country. You can't tell America's story without talking about Hispanic Americans who have left their mark in every corner of life: entertainment, the sciences, the arts, food, music, sports, military, and government.

Hispanic Heritage Month is perhaps more important today than it ever has been. Some politicians are trying furiously to demonize America's diversity, but diversity is what makes America strong. It is what makes America wondrous. And that is why I have always fought to defend Dreamers and fight for comprehensive immigration reform. It is why I have worked with the Biden-Harris administration to lower insulin costs, create good-paying jobs, make our communities safer, and help Hispanic-owned businesses pick themselves up from COVID.

I will also fight for housing reform so that Latinos, like all Americans, can

become homeowners. And finally, I will fight for the Latino museum to honor the contributions of Hispanics and Latinos to our Nation and so much more. We can get it done. Si, se puede.

In the Senate, we have confirmed a historic 37 Latino judicial nominations, 22 of them women. We appointed the first Latina to serve the Federal Reserve in the Board's 109-year history, the first Hispanic judge on the 7th Circuit, and the first openly LGBTQ+ judge for District of Puerto Rico.

And speaking of Puerto Rico, there are few causes that mean more to me as a Senator than helping Puerto Ricans have greater opportunity and a better life. A few months ago, I championed legislation that would expand SNAP benefits to Puerto Ricans, who have been unjustly excluded from this program for decades. This is one reason why it is crucial we make progress on the farm bill because Puerto Ricans deserve the justice that has long been denied to them.

America's strength has always been rooted in our diversity, on our immigrant heritage, on being a home to Americans for all walks of life.

So today, I want to celebrate the contributions of Hispanic Americans to the country we call home. Without them, America as we know it would not be possible.

I yield the floor.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and proceed to the consideration of H.R. 9468, which was received from the House and is at the desk; further, that the only amendment in order to the bill be the Paul amendment No. 3289, which is at the desk; that the time until 11:30 a.m. be for debate only on the amendment and that at 11:30 a.m. the Senate vote on the amendment, with 60 affirmative votes required for adoption; further, that upon disposition of the amendment, the bill, as amended, if amended, be considered read a third time and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, if amended, all without further intervening action or debate.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

VETERANS BENEFITS CONTINUITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2024

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 9468) making supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

HEZBOLLAH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, since October 7, the Israeli military has achieved remarkable success in destroying Hamas's capacity to wage war and in targeting Hezbollah terrorists, but Israel's operations against the Iran-backed terrorists surrounding it have also succeeded in exposing some of the most malignant and persistent biases of Western media against the Jewish State of Israel.

We need to look no further than the astonishing willingness of the most prominent outlets in America to parrot the terrorists' preferred casualty figures, produced by Hamas's own health ministry, or the haste of even the nation's so-called paper of record to attribute to Israel a devastating rocket strike on a hospital that careful observation showed to be the work of the terrorists themselves.

To deny the role of careless coverage and outright bias in the groundswell of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic hate across the West is willful ignorance.

Consider just this morning's example, courtesy of taxpayer-funded National Public Radio. In its coverage of an apparent Israeli operation to target Hezbollah terrorists via their specialized communications networks, NPR described Hezbollah as a "Lebanese militant and political group," but the most accurate descriptor of Hezbollah—a terrorist organization—was conspicuously absent; but NPR editors did manage to include a quote from a man on the street accusing Israel of terrorism.

Well, as intrepid journalists so often remind us, context matters, and it matters especially in the work of an organization that takes Federal Government funding and whose CEO has declared that "reverence for the truth might be a distraction." So let's establish some context.

Hezbollah is arguably the world's most dangerous terrorist group. The U.S. Government and more than 60 other countries recognize this essential characteristic. Hezbollah is funded, trained, and equipped by Iran, and with Iran's help, Hezbollah has conducted terror attacks all around the world—from bombings in Argentina and Greece to backing the ghoulis Assad regime in the Syrian civil war.

Until 9/11, Hezbollah was responsible for the deadliest terror attacks against the United States, killing 321 Americans in bombings of the U.S. Embassy,

marine barracks, and annex in Beirut back in 1983 and 1984. They also coordinated with the IRGC and its master terrorist, Qasem Soleimani, to kill hundreds of U.S. servicemembers in Iraq; and, of course, Hezbollah continues to threaten U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria today.

But, of course, one of Hezbollah's primary reasons for existence is the murder of Jews and the destruction of the Jewish State.

To the extent that it is a political entity, it has corrupted and strangled Lebanon's fragile democracy; and it is Hezbollah's efforts to threaten Israel with tens of thousands of rockets and missiles and its terror tunnels to facilitate the infiltration of Israel that has put Lebanon in the spotlight.

So it may be worth mentioning that, perhaps, the most carefully targeted series of simultaneous attacks against terrorist operatives in human history comes in response to this all-consuming campaign, which has turned Lebanon into the staging area for war on Israel's existence.

So how is that for context?

It is my understanding that the senior Senator from Vermont has said he will introduce joint resolutions of the disapproving of U.S. security assistance to Israel. Such a signal would only empower and embolden terrorists like Hamas and Hezbollah. Each of our colleagues deserves a chance to go on the record right away to reject this extremism.

HARRIS POLICY

Now, Mr. President, on a different matter, I spoke yesterday about how working Americans are having a tough time figuring out where Vice President HARRIS stands on leftwing climate policy. She has played both sides of issues that carry real consequences for the livelihoods and family budgets. Unfortunately, it doesn't stop at the Green New Deal. Voters consistently report that border security is among their top concerns—and with good reason.

In the last 4 years, humanitarian chaos and a security crisis at the southern border has set all the wrong records. Since the Biden-Harris administration took office, the CBP has recorded more than 9.9 million encounters with illegal aliens, and this doesn't include the nearly 2 million known "got-aways." In the past fiscal year alone, the CBP has encountered 2.3 million people attempting to illegally enter our country.

The Democratic nominee for President also happens to be the current administration's point person responsible for this exact issue. You might expect the border czar to have taken command and left a clear idea of where she stands on the issue. Ah, but think again.

Back in 2020, she described President Trump's border wall as a "complete waste of taxpayer money" that "won't make us any safer"; but, recently, she said that she would sign Senator LANKFORD's border bill into law if it

landed on her desk. Remember, this is the bill that would have unlocked hundreds of millions of dollars to fund the construction of that wall.

In 2019, when she first ran for President, our former colleague expressed support for decriminalizing illegal border crossing. Apparently, this was a longstanding view. In her maiden speech in the Senate, she proclaimed:

I know what a crime looks like, and I will tell you: An undocumented immigrant is not a criminal.

But, according to her campaign, she no longer believes that.

On other aspects of border policy, her campaign has declined to say whether her earlier commitments still hold true.

Vice President HARRIS has bragged that she was "one of the first Senators, after President Trump was elected, to advocate for a decrease in funding to ICE." Is she still proud of that stand? The Harris campaign won't say. This is especially puzzling given her stated support for the Lankford border bill, which increases the funding for ICE. Does she not know what is in the legislation she says she now endorses?

In this body, she introduced legislation to decrease detention by at least 50 percent and end funding for new detention facilities. Would she sign a bill like that today? Her campaign is mum on the issue. And they are similarly tight-lipped on the Vice President's 2019 statement of support for taxpayer-funded gender transition treatment for persons in immigration detention facilities.

Now, this isn't to say that the American people are at a total loss for clues on where the Vice President stands. She has repeated often on the campaign trail that "my values have not changed," and it is useful to note who has taken her word for it. The executive director of a progressive immigration group recently put it this way:

We all know and trust Harris to make the right decisions when she's in office.

When it comes to campaign strategy, some of our Democratic colleagues are even saying the quiet part out loud. The senior Senator from Vermont, self-described Democratic Socialist, said:

I don't think she's abandoning her ideals. I think she's tried to be pragmatic and doing what she thinks is right in order to win the election.

The senior Senator from Hawaii reiterated this point. He has said:

I certainly don't think we should be demanding that she take unpopular positions in key States.

Sitting Democratic Senators are calling it like it is: Our former colleague is saying what needs to be said to appeal to independent voters, but when it comes to her progressive agenda, she is dyed in the wool. She just needs to wait until the election to let the mask come off.

So for voters who are trying to make sense of where the Vice President stands, it really comes down to this: If Washington Democrats' leftwing base

isn't afraid of her flip-flops, then it is safe to say that working Americans should be.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, it was another installment of show-vote summer in the Senate this week. Really, the Senate is starting to feel like an arm of the DNC. I say "show vote" because, of course, this week's vote and the other show votes we have taken this summer had nothing at all to do with legislating. These were not attempts to pass bills; these were future campaign talking points and television commercials.

Had the Democrat leader really wanted to pass legislation, I can think of a number of bills he would have brought up. But he isn't actually interested in getting anything done; he is interested—he hopes—in getting votes in November.

With rare exceptions, the Senate has spent essentially the entire summer confirming Biden nominees and conducting show votes, and that is not because there hasn't been important legislation for us to take up. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The Senate has crucial legislation it should have been considering: the National Defense Authorization Act, for one thing—one of the most important pieces of legislation we consider each year—defense appropriations, veterans appropriations, all appropriations.

The end of the fiscal year is almost upon us. We have 11 days left. Yet we haven't taken up a single appropriations bill on the Senate floor. And that is not because the Appropriations Committee hasn't been doing its work—again, quite the opposite. By the beginning of August, the Senate Appropriations Committee had passed 11 out of the 12 yearly appropriations bills, several of them unanimously. Just yesterday, Senator COLLINS, vice chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was on the floor urging the Democrat leader to take action on the appropriations bills.

There is zero—zero—reason why we shouldn't have taken up these bills on the Senate floor. The only reason we haven't is because the Democrat leader has been more interested in scoring political points than in doing the job we were all sent here to do. I hope these hypothetical political points were worth the cost to our military that comes with continuing resolutions, which is what we are going to be forced to resort to now to keep the government running.

In a properly functioning Senate, committee work would be reflected on the Senate floor—for example, by tak-

ing up the appropriations bills that the committee has produced. But in the Schumer Senate, leadership is top down. So the actual work of the Senate and the hard work of the committees have taken a back seat to the Democrat leader's political machinations. As I said, he is currently ignoring the National Defense Authorization Act and 11 appropriations bills—all passed out of the committee, all available for floor consideration, in some cases for months.

In addition to ignoring committee work, the Democrat leader is also happy to interfere with or go around committees when it suits him. The Commerce Committee's final release of the Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill was delayed for months—months—because the Democrat leader objected to an amendment that was likely to pass in committee on a bipartisan basis. Rather than letting the democratic process play out, the Democrat leader chose to call a halt to committee consideration of the bill, bringing the Commerce Committee's work to a standstill literally for months.

While he did finally allow the Senate to take up the bill, we passed the bill a total of 8 months after the previous reauthorization had expired—again, solely because the Democrat leader didn't like an amendment that was likely to pass with bipartisan support.

I was not surprised to learn last week that the leader may proceed right to an informal conference on the National Defense Authorization Act, bypassing consideration of the Senate version of the bill on the floor of the U.S. Senate—again, one of the most consequential pieces of legislation that we do on an annual basis and which should have allowed every Member to have a voice through an amendment process on the floor, but he has made it very clear that Member input is not one of his priorities.

As if the Senate weren't dysfunctional enough, if Democrats win the majority, the Democrat leader intends to destroy perhaps the most important Senate rule we have—the Senate filibuster—permanently diminishing, if not eliminating, any meaningful voice for the minority in the U.S. Senate, which is what this institution was created to represent.

My great hope is to see a properly functioning Senate again, one where, for starters, we actually take up each year's appropriations bills after they come out of the committee. I want to see a Senate where committee work is recognized and serves as the basis for the floor schedule and where committee chairmen are empowered; a Senate where Members have the opportunity to have their voices heard through a robust amendment process, from committee to final consideration here on the floor of the Senate; and a Senate where the role the Senate plays in the legislative branch is respected and protected, starting with safe-

guarding the filibuster rule, which helps preserve the Senate's role as the, as the Founder said, cooling saucer of democracy.

I don't have much hope that we will see this type of Senate if Democrats are reelected and the current Democrat leader continues in his role, but it is the kind of Senate that I will continue to work for and that I hope a majority of Senators aspire to. In the meantime, I guess we will continue with the Democrat leader's show votes.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, it has been my privilege to represent the people of Montana in Congress now for more than a decade. I have seen Congress wrestle and struggle with many challenges during my time here. I have heard my constituents voice concerns—and deservedly so—about many of them. But, by far, one of the worst habits that Congress has is its failure to follow its own budget process. In fact, it is not an understatement to say that the budget process has completely collapsed in both Chambers. And I hear about this back home, and rightfully so.

Wherever I go in Montana, folks tell me they are tired of the dysfunction here in Congress and especially its lack of fiscal discipline. For a body that was elected to represent the will of the people, we are doing the exact opposite. This is simply not what our constituents sent us here to do.

Too many families in our country are living paycheck to paycheck and working sometimes multiple jobs to make ends meet. And, most importantly, they are sacrificing to do so.

When they elect their representatives, they expect good, responsible governing. They expect Congress to operate more like they do when it comes to budgeting and spending and living within their means. Yet, year in and year out, Congress does anything but.

Let me read you the tale of the tape. The last time Congress enacted all 12 appropriations—that is, you could say, passing the budget. That is all the appropriations bills. The last time they met the goal of getting it done by September 30, the end of the fiscal year of the Federal Government, was 1997. That was nearly three decades ago.

And it is not like we wake up on the 1st of January every year and wonder: When are they going to schedule September 30? When is September 30 going to fall this year?

It is not like they surprise us, and we say: Oh, my word, it is September 30.

It is no surprise—27 consecutive years.

Even sadder is how Congress has ignored the Budget Act. The Budget Control Act became law in 1974. This law put into place the modern budget process. It was enacted, ironically, to give Congress more control over Federal spending and the budget process. Theoretically, this would give our constituents a stronger say in how their tax dollars are spent.

But what has Congress done with that authority? Since the Budget Control Act became law, 50 years ago, Congress has been out of control—though the Budget Control Act was passed 50 years ago. Congress rarely even passes a budget resolution anymore, which is supposed to start the budget process every spring.

This resolution is supposed to provide a roadmap for how we approach the appropriations process. Without this roadmap, Congress inevitably finds itself in a spending train wreck, and our constituents, by default, have little say in how their tax dollars are spent. That is exactly what has happened year after year after year—27 consecutive years, in fact.

In the past 50 years since the Budget Control Act was passed, Congress has only enacted all 12 appropriations on time 4 times: 1977, 1989, 1995, and then 1997. Again, back to 1997, we will now have a 27-year consecutive losing streak as we will go past September 30 without having appropriations passed. This year, Senate Democratic leadership hasn't brought a single appropriations bill to the floor, and we are just 12 days from the beginning of the new fiscal year.

Continuing resolutions that fund the government at current levels are now the norm. In fact, between 1977 and last year, Congress passed 200 continuing resolutions—200—and, thus, the threat of a government shutdown is always looming.

All this forces Congress to fund the government through what we call Omnibus appropriations. And for those watching back home, that means, instead of giving each appropriator and appropriations bill a hearing and the scrutiny it deserves, most of the spending bills are all lumped together into one or two giant bills, often thousands of pages long each.

No one has time to read the entire bill before we pass it. So it is usually chock full of wasteful spending on pet projects that we inserted, literally, in the dead of night. Since 1982, Congress has passed 36 Omnibus appropriation bills. That is just short of one per year. Since that time, Omnibus appropriations bills have served as a legislative vehicle for more than half of the Federal Government's appropriations.

In short, our broken budget process has created an incredible amount of uncertainty. In fact, the only thing that is certain in the whole mess is that this broken process has exacerbated the Federal Government's out-of-control spending.

There is no way to run a household this way or a small business—not to

mention the government—and the American people know it.

So why is all this important? As I mentioned, Congress doesn't have a revenue problem. It is not a revenue problem. Look at our deficits and our debt. This is not a revenue problem. It is a spending problem, no matter how you look at it.

Our failed budget process is not only the cause for the fiscal disaster, it is also playing a very significant role. The last time the government had a budget surplus was 23 years ago, back in 2001. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office says that the budget deficit for this year will be around \$2 trillion. That is unprecedented. In fact, the deficit over the next decade will now total a staggering \$22 trillion. That is the deficit added on top of the current debt. Even more frightening is the fact that Medicare will be broke by 2031 and Social Security, by 2034. By 2035, CBO estimates that debt held by the public will top \$50 trillion and be the equivalent of 122 percent of our GDP.

These are staggering numbers. We can't ignore this crisis. To start the long process of fixing it, we need to start with serious reforms in the budget process.

The people of Montana know I am not a creature of Washington, nor, frankly, do I care to be. I am not a career politician. I did not work my way up through the ranks of State legislatures. My experience is in the private sector.

Anyone who has been in Montana knows that while Montana is the most beautiful State in our country, the strength of our great State lies with its people. They are hard-working folks. They believe in an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. They never hesitate to share a good dose of common sense—something that I find severely lacking here in Washington, DC.

Montana common sense combined with my private sector background taught me a number of principles I think we can apply to our budget process.

For starters, let's hold Members accountable, and performance needs to be scrutinized. When structural failure persists, it has to be addressed. For that reason, if Members of Congress can't pass all 12 appropriations bills on time, suspend their pay. Don't shut down the government; shut down the pay of Members of Congress. In fact, shut down their pay, shut down their travel, force them to stay here in Washington, and believe me, this will get resolved rather quickly. Because we all know, if you don't do your job, you don't deserve to be paid, especially when the American people are the folks paying us. That would put an end to government shutdowns.

Let's be honest. Shutting down the government only punishes the American people and increases costs. It is exactly the wrong thing we need to do. But put the pain on Congress, and that

will start to change things around here in a hurry.

Second, Congress should address all spending, including discretionary and nondiscretionary programs. Think about it. Discretionary spending is utterly dysfunctional, and there are virtually no forcing mechanisms to require Congress to actually deal with the autopilot spending that accounts for nearly 70 percent of Federal spending. Avoiding the tough challenge of the mandatory spending means our national debt will just continue to soar to new, incomprehensible heights, and that puts our kids and our grandchildren on the hook. This will require bipartisan cooperation to save these programs for future generations.

Speaking of bipartisanship, the reforms we make must work whether we have unified government or divided government. Right now, it is about impossible to pass a bicameral budget during divided government. This just leads to the unwanted, behind-closed-doors mad dash as the expiration date of the latest continuing resolution approaches, which leads to my final and maybe my most important point.

Any reforms to our broken budget process must be bipartisan. There are always going to be disagreements around how taxpayer dollars should be spent, but we should be able to agree on a workable, durable process to make those decisions. To that end, we need to build on the good work of my late friend and former colleague, the late Senator Mike Enzi from Wyoming.

During more than two decades serving in the Senate, Mike worked tirelessly on this issue. Many of his proposals deserve a strong look if Congress is ever to find a solution. I believe two deserve particular attention. The first would reorient the budget resolution to a 2-year cycle. That would allow Congress more time to not only develop but also enforce the budget. I also believe Senator Enzi's proposal to create a new special reconciliation process that could only be used for reducing the deficit also warrants consideration.

There are many others. I know a number of my colleagues have weighed in on this issue as well. I welcome their ideas.

The question I pose today to Members on both sides of the aisle is, When are we going to get serious about addressing this calamity? How many more times are we going to kick the can down the road? How many more shutdowns? How high must our deficits and debt climb before we say enough is enough?

Mr. President, I humbly submit today that we did reach that point, actually, long ago. It is past time to bring the common sense of Montanans to bear on the Nation's budget process. Now is the time for serious budget reform.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted

to speak for up to 20 minutes and that Senator PAUL be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 5074

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I want to compliment my good friend from Montana, Senator DAINES, who was on the floor just now talking about government accountability. That is what I am going to talk about—government accountability. We need much more of it, and we need much more of it in the Veterans Administration.

So today, what I am going to be doing is I am going to ask for unanimous consent on my bill, the PRO Vets Act, that we all need to move forward, both on funding the VA—I am going to talk about this shortfall—but also on having some reforms to the VA. They are very simple.

I will be really disappointed if any of my colleagues come down here and block my unanimous consent request. That is just me asking all my Senate colleagues to pass this bill right now. But when you hear about it, you will say: Why wouldn't we pass that? Holy cow. The VA needs a little accountability—actually, a lot of accountability.

But here is what is going on. A little context of my legislation—which, by the way, right now already has 15 cosponsors. We just put this together 2 weeks ago, given the crisis at the VA, and it has 15 cosponsors.

Just 6 weeks ago, Congress was officially informed and many of us were surprised—by the way, I sit on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, so I am very focused on these issues. Our committee was informed that the VA was experiencing a \$15 billion shortfall and that by the end of this week, tomorrow, they need an additional \$3 billion or veterans across the country, including in my State—the great State of Alaska has more veterans per capita than any State in the country, so we love our veterans; it is a very important constituency of mine—they wouldn't get their benefits unless we act real quick.

The House acted 2 nights ago, and we are going to get this money done. We will get it. We want to make sure our veterans have their benefits. But in exchange, we are asking: Hey, what is going on over at the VA? I mean, we see this all the time—mismanagement, last-minute requests for money, illegal bonuses up to \$11 million just a couple of months ago paid out to people in the VA who don't deserve it.

My bill is very simple. It is going to bring accountability to the VA—for course, that is a vital institution for our veterans and our country—with some more oversight and accountability. It is not complicated at all. It is basically two things. We are going to fund this short-term \$3 billion amount of money the VA says it needs ASAP, even though they didn't inform us until 6 weeks ago.

By the way, the total amount they need in terms of how they screwed up the budget is \$15 billion. That is a lot of money.

So it just says—the bill requires two things. It institutes a 3-year requirement for the Secretary of the VA to submit quarterly, in-person budget reports to Congress to encourage greater oversight and financial accountability—that is pretty simple—and the Secretary should come to us quarterly with these budget estimates and brief our committee, the VA Committee, in person—easy—and for any future financial shortfalls, which we are experiencing right now, it would result in the withholding of bonuses for senior VA and OMB personnel who worked on that budget. That is it. That is it, Mr. President.

Most people would say, “Hey, that is pretty good reform; it is not too much,” but, remarkably, I think one of my Senate colleagues is going to come down here and object.

So we are going to throw \$3 billion at the VA, and we just have simple reforms: The Secretary comes quarterly to the committee and says: Hey, we are not going to blow through the budget again. Here are our quarterly estimates.

By the way, if you are part of the team at a senior level that screwed up the budget, you don't get a bonus.

What is wrong with that? Maybe my colleagues won't object. That is it. That is the bill, because we are going to give the VA, again, additional money that they didn't plan for.

This is not the first time this has happened. As a matter of fact, I have been on the VA Committee going on 10 years. I really like the committee. As I mentioned, veterans in Alaska, veterans in America are so important. But the VA in DC often screws up the budget. It often comes up with scandals. Heck, like I said, just a couple of months ago, \$11 million went out to senior VA officials for bonuses that they didn't deserve.

In a hearing yesterday, I asked: Has anyone been held responsible for that? No.

Anyone held responsible for this budget oversight?

No.

So, as I mentioned, there have been a lot of these kinds of scandals. Some of you might remember the VA secret waiting list at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Health Care System.

CNN described the secret waiting list as the following:

The secret list was part of an elaborate scheme designed by Veterans Affairs managers in Phoenix who were trying to hide that 1,400 to 1,600 sick veterans were forced to wait months to see a doctor.

Forty of them died waiting. Pretty scandalous.

The hospital in Colorado had a budget overrun in 2016, and Congress had to do what we are doing right now—jump in immediately, at the last minute. That was budgeted—it was three times

the amount it was budgeted that they ran over to build that hospital. But we again acted—hundreds of millions of dollars at the last minute because of VA mismanagement.

Here is the thing: The Congress—even the Veterans' Affairs Committee—is becoming numb to these kinds of shortfalls and these kinds of dysfunctional approaches to management for our veterans.

Let me be clear. I work with the VA in Alaska all the time. The people on the ground helping our veterans—the vast, vast majority do a great job. But the problem seems to be here in DC, with this giant bureaucracy.

Last week, the inspector general—President Biden's inspector general for the VA, in front of the House, testified along the following lines about a report they just had in terms of an investigation of the VA. They said: Our staff—the inspector general's staff—“routinely finds breakdowns in processes, infrastructure, governance, leadership, and other failings that erode the foundational elements of accountability” at the VA.

Last week, the IG of the VA said that.

These breakdowns impede [the] VA's efforts to make certain that patients receive timely, high-quality healthcare and that veterans and other eligible beneficiaries are afforded the compensation and services they are owed.

So here is the Biden administration IG, inspector general, saying: We have big problems at the VA.

Now we are seeing it with another cost overrun.

Like I said, \$15 billion budget shortfall for the VA right now. We only heard about it 6 weeks ago; and I, with several members of the VA Committee, 6 weeks ago as soon as we heard about this, sent a letter to the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee at the end of July saying: Hey, we need an immediate hearing, right now. Let's do it right now and have the Secretary testify in person to tell us what the heck is going on. What are you doing over there? OK?

The chairman didn't do that. He waited till yesterday to hold the hearing. The Secretary didn't show up to come testify, and we heard all kinds of things from the witnesses from the VA.

But what we didn't hear is anything about accountability. We did hear this, by the way, and if—I think most Americans, most Alaskans, would find this stunning. The VA has a new rule. We went through a pandemic 4 years ago. People were doing remote work. Guess what? Most of the Federal Government is still doing remote work. Most Federal employees still, like, work in their pajamas next to a computer at home.

The VA's new rule is that you are required to come into the office twice in a pay period. Excuse me, what? Some of those VA workers in DC work at home in their pajamas. Can you believe that, America? We have these big, beautiful Federal buildings here and

nobody comes into them. I mean, come on.

So maybe the Secretary was teleworking yesterday, part of his rule that you only have to come in twice a month to work. So we need accountability. We need accountability.

Now, as usual, the VA and other bureaucrats are saying, hey, this is actually a good thing that we have a \$15 billion shortfall. This is a good thing because more veterans are getting benefits.

Well, listen, I voted for the bill that is helping our veterans with regard to burn pits. I voted for all that legislation, and it is good that we are getting veterans to have more benefits that they have earned, but that doesn't excuse the VA mismanagement of its budget or the idea that Congress, if it is going to appropriate more money at the last minute, which is what we are going to do—and I am supporting that—that we apply accountability.

Here is what the legislative director for the VFW supplied in written testimony to the House last week:

"Since news of the funding shortfall became public, the communications on the matter from the VA has been inappropriately positive"—

So this is the VFW saying: Hey, VA, don't spin this.

That it is positive because the VA is "delivering more benefits than ever," as if the VA's miscalculation that now threatens the delivery of all compensation, pension, and education benefits is somehow a positive thing.

So the VFW is looking straight at the VA saying: Don't spin this. The \$15 billion shortfall you just told us about, we have got to rush to fund it or veterans across America are going to lose their benefits? That is not positive. No matter how they spin it, it is not positive. It is called mismanagement.

So, again, all I am asking for as part of the money that we are going to appropriate on an emergency basis for the VA is to simply pass my vets act, my Pro Vets Act.

And, again, here is all it does: The Secretary of the VA has to come in quarterly to the committee, in person, out of your pajamas, and tell us what the budget is so we don't have this again.

And if you are part of the VA or OMB team that put forward a budget that the VA went over, you don't get a bonus. That is eminently reasonable. Reasonable, Mr. President. And I hope my colleagues here will support it.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 5074, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object. I share my

colleague's focus on making sure we never have shortfalls that deny our veterans the care and benefits they were promised. And we are going to vote in just a bit on a VA supplemental package to make sure the VA has the resources it needs. And it even includes reporting requirements similar to what is proposed here.

As we implement laws like the PACT Act, which makes worthwhile expansions of our veterans' care, there is going to be some growing pains. That is frustrating, but it is not unheard of.

The important thing—and I think we all agree here—is meeting those needs and keeping our word to our veterans and their families, and I would say, as a daughter of a veteran, I take that responsibility very seriously.

Now, while I am not convinced all of the elements of this proposal are the most effective way to work with VA on these issues right now, I do sincerely appreciate where my colleague is coming from and I am willing to work with him on this.

So I look forward to continuing this conversation and working in a bipartisan way to make sure the VA is working for our veterans. But right now, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. While I have worked closely with my colleague from Washington on the Veterans' Affairs Committee in the Senate, I know she is committed to veterans, and I want to work with her on these matters. I will say, though, I would disagree with her on one major issue. She mentioned growing pains and the PACT Act has expanded veterans' benefits. And that is good; I voted for that bill. But this isn't about growing pains. This is about what the IG just testified to the House on last week, and it is systemic problems of accountability at the VA.

And to be honest, if you are on the committee, you know that more than anybody because we see it all the time. So I am disappointed that simple reforms, accountability, the Secretary coming in quarterly, in person, not teleworking like 99 percent of the VA currently does—and shouldn't do, by the way—telling Congress where they are in the budget so you are not going to have another overrun.

And then if you made the mistake—and there is a big budget overrun, you don't get a bonus. Very simple. I am really disappointed that we can't undertake basic, simple accountability reforms when we are, once again, at the last minute, scrambling to make sure due to the VA's mismanagement, Congress is coming in with additional money making sure our veterans get their benefits, that is not the way to run a really important Federal bureaucracy and organization like we have at the VA. And I am disappointed that my bill is not being passed right now, in addition to getting the additional funding to the VA for our veterans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. PAUL. As we have been discussing, the Veterans' Affairs is out of money. Now, this is not something that was unpredictable. I predicted this a year or two ago when we expanded benefits.

I think it is the priority and it is the responsibility of America to take care of its veterans, but we still have to think about what we are doing. We can't say: Well, every veteran should have a Corvette and \$200,000 a year because we don't have the money for that.

So we try to link benefits to something we can afford and something within reason related to their service.

When the PACT Act was passed, though, there were those of us saying: Hmm, if you allow something like high blood pressure to be associated with military service, you may have a problem. I am 61 years old. Sixty percent of people over 60 have hypertension. You think you might get too many people applying for things if you allow really common conditions like hypertension to be connected to these benefits.

What we were talking about were burn pits. And burn pits you can convince me—and they have—that inhaling things from burn pits might damage your lungs, and you might have respiratory diseases or lung cancers. But saying hypertension is related to this allows Pandora's box, and now we have millions of people flooding through the doors to get benefits, and they are out of money.

This is typical of Washington. This year, we will spend \$6 trillion, and we will bring in 4. No American family can do that, no State does that, no city does that, no county does that.

Washington's fiscal recklessness is putting the American dream out of reach for millions of Americans.

Historically high rates of inflation from this debt have made every American poorer. As families across the country struggle to put food on the table, Washington seems content to spend money without regard to the consequences.

But sometimes the consequences are too shameful to ignore. Congressional spending and mismanagement at the Department of Veterans' Affairs are the latest examples, with both resulting in a nearly \$3 billion shortfall, threatening the benefits of millions of veterans.

Our veterans shouldn't have to pay the cost for the Federal Government's incompetence. This is why I ask the Senate to adopt my amendment today.

My amendment would just simply offset the new money they need for the Veterans' Affairs that they didn't calculate well and didn't appropriate by taking it from somewhere else in the budget. To me, it seems eminently reasonable. Rather than borrow more money and put ourselves further into

debt—we have a \$35 trillion debt—why don't we find something in the budget maybe that is not an emergency, take the money from there, and pay for the veterans benefits? My amendment would ensure the veterans receive their benefits without adding to the national debt.

My amendment is simple. It pays for the veterans benefits by rescinding \$2.9 billion in Department of Energy loan guarantees. The American taxpayer should not be asked to subsidize companies with vast resources, often multimillion-dollar owners, that are for this green energy that we are going to subsidize.

Well, which is more important, subsidizing millionaire owners of green energy or paying for veterans' benefits? Why not take one to pay for the other?

Unsurprisingly, these loans, these green loans that are out there, these gambles that have been taken by the Department of Energy, have come at an exorbitant cost. A 2015 GAO study revealed the extent of the Department of Energy's loan program failures. The report lists that five companies defaulted on similar Department of Energy loans, including Solyndra, Fisker, Abound Solar, Beacon Power, and Vehicle Production Group, costing the taxpayers \$807 million.

So these loans are not without risks. We cut these loans, we cut our risk, and we shift the money over to veterans. I think it is a pretty easy thing. It could be done in a few minutes.

But if you will watch, if you will watch the vote, my guess is that nobody from the other side of the aisle will vote to transfer the money over to the veterans. They will just say: Borrow it, put it on my tab. Well, that is why you go to the grocery store and a steak costs \$20 at the grocery store; this is why gasoline costs are up; this is why all your prices are up; this is why home prices are doubling, because they are diminishing the value of the dollar with all the borrowing.

So today they will add another \$3 billion. They don't care. They think money grows on trees. Here it is, \$3 billion, take it. We care about the veterans, but we don't give a damn about the debt. You can care about both. I am for shifting money. Let's don't increase the debt today. Let's take \$3 billion that would go to millionaires who own these companies and shift it over to the veterans. Pretty simple. How could anybody vote against it?

But watch the vote. Everyone on the other side of the aisle is going to vote to borrow the money rather than pay for it by shifting the money. The VA shortfall was very foreseeable just as the failure of the DOE loans. The VA has been overwhelmed, receiving more than 2.4 million claims in 2023—the most ever, 39 percent higher.

I warned them, when you pass this, when you allow hypertension to be associated with disability, you are opening Pandora's box, because everybody has got hypertension.

You may recall, I stood here on the Senate floor and warned that the PACT Act would put veterans benefits at risk. Why? Because there truly are veterans that were damaged by burn pits. They inhaled the smoke, and they have chronic asthma, emphysema or cancer.

But those deserving people are having the money taken by people who have high blood pressure. Everybody's got high blood pressure. So if you put them in there, what you are doing is stealing the benefits from the truly—the people who have lung damage from breathing in these fumes.

It is always about, Oh, we care about everybody. Everybody should get money. It is free. No problem. We will just borrow it. Instead of saying: Why don't we try to conserve the resources for those who actually were injured by the burn pits? Instead, it is like: Oh, you got high blood pressure? Sign up. Come on down. We will get you some money.

The PACT Act created a presumption of service connection for hypertension. The CDC estimates 116 million Americans have hypertension: 50 percent of men, 44 percent of women. Over 60 percent of all people have hypertension. If you include hypertension as a trigger for benefits, it broadens the category of recipients so much that it has contributed to the depletion of the funds.

So instead of asking why we are short \$3 billion—no one is asking why we are short. They are just, Put it on my tab. Put it on the Nation's tab. Borrow more money.

Why don't we find out what the problem is? Why are we short on money? Because they decided to include hypertension as a trigger for disability.

Because of Congress's inability to make difficult decisions, precious resources that ought to go to veterans exposed to toxic substances are at risk of going up in smoke. They are at risk of being diverted to people who weren't injured by the burn pits.

Congress must take its oversight responsibility seriously, hold the VA accountable for fiscal mismanagement and corruption. In fiscal year 2023, the VA issued 3 billion in improper payments. So we have Veterans Affairs \$3 billion short of money, but we found out they gave \$3 billion to the wrong people. They made a mistake of issuing checks to the wrong people for \$3 billion. Why wouldn't we ask the VA: Hey, we know you are short of money, but guess what. You have got to quit sending the money to the wrong people.

Why wouldn't the people who are sending the money to the wrong people be punished, reassigned? Maybe they shouldn't work for the VA if they aren't competent enough to get the money to the people who are the right people.

Over the past 3 years, it is estimated the VA has had \$10 billion in improper payments. In May 2024, the VA's inspector general reported that the Department improperly awarded over \$10

million in incentives to its own senior executives. So it has been determined by the inspector general that the VA paid their own executives \$10 million in bonuses that shouldn't have been given to the executives, while the executives were overseeing \$3 billion that went to the wrong people.

There are resources that could have been devoted—these resources that were wasted and squandered could have been devoted to veterans, to their benefits. Instead, the VA shamefully squandered them.

It is high time that the Members of this body face the incontrovertible fact that Congress's reckless spending has awful consequences. We have seen it in the form of inflation. This is what is happening to Americans. It is what is making all of us poor. And now we see that overspending threatens the benefits that were promised to veterans.

We must use these failures as a warning. We must get serious about our spending and oversight responsibilities. I encourage my colleagues to vote for my amendment as a first step to ensuring our veterans receive the care they deserve.

AMENDMENT NO. 3289

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I call up my amendment No. 3289 and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Kentucky [Mr. PAUL] proposes an amendment numbered 3289.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To rescind funds from the Department of Energy loan programs office)

At the appropriate place, insert the following:

SEC. _____. OFFSET.

Of the unobligated balances of the amount made available under section 50141(b) of Public Law 117-169 (136 Stat. 2043) (commonly referred to as the "Inflation Reduction Act"), \$2,882,482,000 are rescinded.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there be 2 minutes of debate, equally divided, prior to each vote.

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

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, you know, when it comes to supporting our veterans, the bottom line is, we have to live up to our word and get the benefits and care they were promised. I am pleased to say we have a long bipartisan history of coming together and putting our veterans first. That is what the bill before us is about.

But this amendment would jeopardize all of that by making partisan cuts to unrelated programs. Our veterans should not be used as partisan leverage, simple as that.

Now, I fully outright oppose this amendment on the merits. But even for colleagues who may feel differently, I would urge you to join me in voting against this amendment because we should all agree that veterans are not fair game for partisan poison pills. Our

promise to our veterans and their families is a sacred responsibility we have to live up to, not political leverage.

I urge all of my colleagues who feel the same to join me in voting no.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, this amendment is simply about paying for veterans' benefits. It doesn't stop veterans' benefits. It actually pays for them by moving money from wasteful programs over to Veterans Affairs to pay for their benefits.

It does this so we don't add to the debt. I mean, our veterans fought for our country, our national security. Our biggest threat to our national security now is our debt. I think our veterans would want us to do this in a responsible manner.

This amendment makes the veterans' benefits paid for by taking money elsewhere in the budget. It is a responsible way to go.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 3289

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on adoption of amendment No. 3289.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Delaware (Mr. CARPER) and the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL), the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. VANCE).

The result was announced—yeas 47, nays 47, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 247 Leg.]

YEAS—47

Barrasso	Ernst	Murkowski
Blackburn	Fischer	Paul
Boozman	Graham	Ricketts
Braun	Grassley	Risch
Britt	Hagerty	Romney
Brown	Hawley	Rubio
Budd	Hoeben	Schmitt
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Collins	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lankford	Tester
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Cramer	Lummis	Tuberville
Crapo	McConnell	Wicker
Cruz	Moran	Young
Daines	Mullin	

NAYS—47

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Merkley
Bennet	Hassan	Murphy
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Murray
Booker	Helmy	Ossoff
Butler	Hickenlooper	Padilla
Cantwell	Hirono	Peters
Cardin	Kaine	Reed
Casey	Kelly	Rosen
Coons	King	Sanders
Cortez Masto	Klobuchar	Schatz
Duckworth	Lujan	Schumer
Durbin	Manchin	Shaheen
Fetterman	Markey	Sinema

Smith	Warner	Welch
Stabenow	Warnock	Whitehouse
Van Hollen	Warren	

NOT VOTING—6

Carper	Rounds	Vance
Marshall	Tillis	Wyden

(Mr. KING assumed the Chair.)

(The PRESIDENT pro tempore assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). On this vote, the yeas are 47, the nays are 47.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to.

The amendment (No. 3289) was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will now be 2 minutes of debate, equally divided.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, today, thanks to the PACT Act, more veterans are getting access to more benefits than ever before. But we need to provide additional funding to make sure we keep our promise to all of our veterans, which is why we now have a bill to provide \$2.9 billion in additional funding for the Veterans Benefits Administration to pay compensation and pension and readjustment benefits.

This is funding that goes directly to our veterans and that they have been promised. But without this bill, in less than 2 weeks' time, the VA will be unable to issue payments to as many as 7 million veterans and their survivors and 800,000 veterans seeking readjustment benefits.

Our veterans were there for us. We have to be there for them. Congress has a responsibility to ensure these veterans and their family members and survivors receive the benefits they have earned on time. It is as simple as that.

I hope every single one of my colleagues will join me in standing with our veterans and vote to get this done.

Mr. President, I yield back all time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate?

Hearing none, under the previous order, the bill is considered read a third time.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

VOTE ON H.R. 9468

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

The bill (H.R. 9468) was passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume executive session.

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

The Senator from New Jersey.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. HELMY. Madam President, it is a distinct honor to stand in this es-

teemed Chamber as a Member of the world's greatest deliberative body, the U.S. Senate. That I am even standing here, just as the 81st New Jersey, the 204th American, currently the only Arab American, and the first member of the Coptic Church to hold the title of U.S. Senator, is something I had never imagined and still struggle to accept.

For many years, I proudly served as a staffer for two U.S. Senators from the great State of New Jersey: first, the late Senator Frank Lautenberg; and, as fate would have it, my friend, mentor, now colleague, and senior Senator, CORY BOOKER. As such, it was always my job to be the guy behind the guy. It was my job to make sure they were prepared, that they had the best possible counsel, and were ready to make the consequential decisions required of every U.S. Senator. So standing here now is a little odd, a little overwhelming, and very humbling.

I will, as I have for many years, continue to do my utmost to live up to the faith placed in me by Governor Phil Murphy to be thoughtful, diligent, and a forceful voice and representative of the people of New Jersey. And I have a very short window in which to do just that. In fact, it is my stated intention to resign from this post once the general election is certified by Lieutenant Governor Tahesha Way, who also serves as our secretary of state, at which point Governor Murphy has said he will appoint my duly elected successor.

So there is a possibility that my tenure in this body will last all of 73 days. Should that be the case, that means I will tie for the 10th shortest ever tenure as a U.S. Senator, which also means I will forever be rooting for the good health and good fortune of those who follow so that I can make at least one top 10 list at some point in my life.

As with those who have come before me and those who will follow me, no one comes to this august and revered Chamber because they were a wallflower before they got here. So, then, no one seeks to be a wallflower, whether they are here for a day or for a decade.

The challenges facing our Nation are many, but that means so too are the opportunities, and I am going to lean into these opportunities so that, while my time here may be short, my impact may be lasting. So I intend to be focused and I intend to be busy, and I intend to make every single day count for the people of New Jersey.

One vital issue close to my heart and which I will spend much of my energy on over the next 9 weeks is that of our Nation's youth mental health crisis. As a father of two sons—Joshua, age 15, and Elijah, age 12—I know that I cannot make them immune from the strains and stressors that impact their or their friends' mental health, but I can at least try to mitigate the harmful impacts of those stressors while I hold office—and longer, while the Lord gives me life and voice.