

from the last administration's attitude. I greatly look forward to voting in favor of Representative HAALAND's nomination in a few short hours.

Throughout the week, the Senate will process even more of President Biden's highly qualified Cabinet nominees, including Xavier Becerra to serve as the next Secretary of Health and Human Services; Isabella Guzman to serve as the SBA Administrator; and Katherine Tai to serve as the U.S. Trade Representative.

As President Biden continues to fight the COVID pandemic and begins implementing the American Rescue Plan, he deserves to have his team in place ASAP, as soon as possible.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, now on the American Rescue Plan, late last week, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan into law. The most significant Federal recovery effort in decades is now underway as \$1,400 checks are heading out the door to 85 percent of American households. Relief for schools, businesses, families, and State and local governments is starting to arrive. Shots are going into the arms of Americans from coast to coast. More than 135 million doses of the vaccine have now been delivered, and over 100 million doses have now been administered. That is one-third of the population and much more quickly than had been previously projected.

And our economy is poised for its own shot in the arm. As the American Rescue Plan begins to take effect, economists are projecting that American economic growth could more than double as a result of this bold, strong legislation.

Already, Americans are more optimistic about businesses being able to reopen, jobs coming back, and the national economy taking off. As one headline read over the weekend, "Americans see better days ahead in pandemic and economy."

After the American Rescue Plan passed through the Senate, a little over a week ago, I have been highlighting parts of the bill that may have escaped notice, and there are so many. We all know about the \$1,400 checks. We all know about the shots in the arm. But, today, I want to take some time explaining how it helps our Nation's students.

First of all, the American Rescue Plan provides substantial emergency relief to colleges and universities, weighted toward those colleges and universities without million-dollar endowments. Fully half of that funding must be used for emergency financial aid grants to students—at least \$20 billion nationwide. And, of course, many students will benefit from the \$1,400 checks. Any student with a young family will benefit from the historic expansion of the child tax credit. But these emergency financial aid grants

are another way that students with exceptional need can access relief.

That is not all. The American Rescue Plan also sets the stage for President Biden to deliver incredibly meaningful student loan forgiveness by making all types of student loan forgiveness tax free through December.

At the moment, debt cancellation is usually treated as taxable income. So without this provision, forgiving a student's debt would stick them with a tax bill—giving with one hand and taking away with the other. This would apply to more than 100,000 students who are already in repayment programs that offer some student loan forgiveness. Crucially, this tax provision would apply to future efforts to forgive student loans as well.

I believe the current administration has the legal authority to forgive up to \$50,000 in Federal student loan debt, a life-changing policy decision that would boost our economy and help close the racial wealth gap.

Twenty years after starting college, the median White borrower will owe 6 percent of their debt, while the median Black borrower owes 95 percent of their debt. Canceling up to \$50,000 in student debt would close the racial wealth gap by 28 percentage points among those households. That is just one of the many reasons Senator WARREN and I have been advocating this policy to cancel \$50,000 of student debt. And, as I mentioned, it has become an issue of racial justice as well.

President Biden, to his credit, has already proposed some student loan forgiveness—up to around \$10,000. But now, one of the objections that some in the administration have had, that students with forgiven debt will have to pay taxes, is gone, gone, gone because of the ARP.

I particularly want to thank Senators MENENDEZ and WARREN for their work on these provisions. For much of American history, education has been the ladder up. For too many these days, student debt has become the anchor weighting them down, making it harder to start a family, buy a home, plan a career, and so much more. The pandemic has stressed student finances even closer to the breaking point.

Thankfully, the American Rescue Plan not only delivers short-term relief but clears the way for long-term relief for American students by saying: When we forgive your debt, you don't have to pay taxes on it.

American students collectively bear more than \$1.7 trillion in student debt. When you think of young people and they are starting out their lives, and there is so much excitement and enthusiasm, and then they have \$1.7 trillion of debt on their shoulders weighting them down, that is not the American way of sunny optimism and can-do. This system sprung out of control in many ways. Going after the for-profit colleges, making sure they don't take advantage, is one way we are trying to curtail it. But for the students who

have this debt, future actions won't do any good in terms of changing the way we finance colleges and how we deal with the for-profits. The best way is canceling \$50,000 in student debt, and the good news is that the ARP makes sure no taxes are owed on any of that cancellation.

So no matter how their team performs during March Madness this weekend, the American Rescue Plan gives every student something to cheer about.

Go Syracuse.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, last Thursday, I spoke about the pain and disruption this pandemic has caused this past year. I also discussed the optimistic springtime that lies before us. The brighter horizon is not a product of a partisan bill that was signed last week or an administration that was sworn in less than 2 months ago; it was built by the American people and supported by the five historic and completely bipartisan bills that Congress passed just last year.

Later on Thursday, the Nation heard remarks from President Biden. The President spoke in a heartfelt way about grief and loss, but his vision for the days ahead was badly lacking. Along a number of crucial dimensions, the Biden administration keeps trying to rewrite recent history and overrule science.

Let's take vaccinations. The President's speech tried to reinforce the myth that his administration inherited a shambles on vaccines, set goals that nobody believed were achievable, and has met those goals against all odds. This is just not true.

The President said:

I set a goal that many of you said was . . . way over the top.

But the benchmark of 100 million vaccines in 100 days was not some audacious goal that was met with great skepticism. A million shots per day was just the pace that the Biden administration actually inherited. We averaged more than 1 million shots per day the week of the inauguration. We totaled more than 1.5 million the day the President was sworn in.

The groundwork we laid last year is proving a historic success. Where the

Biden administration is continuing to help streamline distribution, they should, of course, get some credit, but their effort to sprint to the front of this yearlong campaign should not fool anybody.

The President announced another supposedly audacious goal on Thursday: that all adults in all 50 States should be eligible to schedule vaccinations by May 1. Here is the problem: Dr. Fauci said a month ago we would be there by April.

I would imagine by the time we get to April, that will be what I would call . . . "open season" . . . namely, virtually everybody and anybody in any category could start to get vaccinated.

That was Dr. Fauci's prediction last month. So the President's announcement of May 1 wasn't ambitious good news; it was actually a walk-back.

Something tells me that if the last administration had contradicted Dr. Fauci and pushed the vaccine milestone back a whole month, we might have heard about it from the media.

Then there is the K-12 schooling. For months, science has confirmed that schools are remarkably safe and do not surge transmission of the virus. This administration's own experts amplified this before liberal politics got in the way.

In early February, President Biden's CDC Director specifically said vaccinating the grownups who work in schools should not be a prerequisite for reopening them, but on Thursday, instead of calling for schools to reopen right now, the President endorsed Big Labor's moving goalposts. He said that because the Democrats passed their spending plan and because he has tried to move teachers toward the front of the line for vaccines, now—now—schools can move toward reopening. This approach has put liberal interest group politics ahead of vulnerable kids and their parents.

It was reported last week that the following message was posted in a private online group for members of one public school union in California.

Friendly reminder: If you are planning any trips for Spring Break, please keep that off of social media. It is hard to argue that it is unsafe for in-person instruction if parents and the public see vacation photos and international travel.

Further reports from California suggest some local governments may consider using some of the massive bailouts that Democrats sent them on bonuses. Reportedly, one union argues that grownups should get bonuses for things like "an airplane trip to Hawaii when this is all over." A lot of working-class families in the country are struggling through untenable situations—in large part thanks to the liberal dogma that schools have needed lots more cash to become safe—and now unions are talking about trips to Hawaii?

Every day that the Biden administration does not urge schools to reopen safely right now with simple pre-

cautions, it hurts kids who cannot afford these moving goalposts.

President Biden also made news with the big proclamation that maybe—maybe—if citizens behave themselves, we will be able to have small outdoor gatherings by July 4. He made sure to stipulate that politicians reserve the right to clamp down again, however, but that carrot dangled before Americans was small outdoor gatherings about 4 months from now. This was bizarre and problematic on several levels.

No. 1, let's be clear: The Federal Government does not instruct free citizens how they may gather in small groups with their own families. I have advocated strongly for following science, wearing masks, and taking all the precautions throughout this pandemic. The White House confers a bully pulpit. It does not confer supreme authority over daily life.

Let's not forget that about 10 months ago, many liberal politicians applauded massive outdoor gatherings because they supported a political cause. I am not sure how much capital these officials have to micromanage backyard barbecues.

No. 2, this strange proclamation was out of step with science. Current CDC guidelines say it is already safe right now—right now—for fully vaccinated people to meet in small groups, not just outdoors but indoors, and they can be joined by an unvaccinated household if they are low risk. That is the CDC's advice, talking not about July 4 but right now. Right now.

So the President went on national TV to move the goalposts way beyond what his own CDC is saying. Why? There is no science-based reason why a few fully vaccinated people couldn't get together outdoors right now—not July 4; today. And if a healthy young adult who is still waiting for the vaccine wants to meet up with a few vaccinated relatives, that is about a personal assessment of a very small risk, not a matter of Presidential policy.

That brings me to point three. The President's proclamation was far out of step with what is already happening across the country. It was advice for an alternate universe. The President and his advisers may need to get out more. Americans are already getting together in small groups outdoors in blue States and red States, in small towns and big cities. The country is not locked down waiting for July 4.

In my home State of Kentucky, the Governor has backed indoor gatherings of up to eight people from up to two households. Here in the District of Columbia, as of next week, outdoor gatherings of up to 50 people will be permitted—50 people here in the District.

Americans are getting vaccines. They have learned about this disease. They have learned about the low risks of outdoor transmission. They are making their own determinations as free people.

Look, I have been a consistent advocate for following the science, wearing

a mask, and taking precautions. I believe we should all keep following the science. Nobody wants to fumble the ball on the 5-yard line. But that doesn't mean just citizens; it means politicians too. And science doesn't only run in the direction of more restrictions.

The American people were told 12 months ago that accepting major disruptions for a limited time would flatten the curve and prevent a healthcare collapse, and Americans rose to the occasion.

One year on, if the President and his administration want to continue to give advice to free citizens, I suggest they exit the alternate universe, stick to the actual science, and get acquainted with where the American people actually are.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of DEBRA ANNE HAALAND, of New Mexico, to be Secretary of the Interior.

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

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

NOMINATIONS OF LISA MONACO AND VANITA GUPTA

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, last week, my friend and colleague, the senior Senator from Texas, came to the floor to speak about two highly qualified nominees seeking senior positions in President Biden's Justice Department—Lisa Monaco and Vanita Gupta.

I was pleased to hear Senator CORNYN express support for Lisa Monaco. She is nominated to be the Deputy Attorney General. She has vast experience and deep ties to the Department. She has served in multiple roles as both a career employee and a Senate-confirmed official. She is also someone who has predicted and responded to several of the greatest threats of our time, including global pandemics and the rise of domestic terrorism. She has what it takes to serve as the No. 2 person in the Department of Justice and along with the Attorney General, Merrick Garland, to restore independence and integrity in that Department.