timely, I believe thoughtful, and which the American people overwhelmingly supported.

So I would say to the defenders of the filibuster: Show us it can work. We have had so little legislative activity that was subject to this filibuster rule over the last several years, and, obviously, some Senators are very content with that. I am not. There is work to be done, not just in the areas I have mentioned but in so many others. Infrastructure programs for Americans are a good example too.

Let's get to work in the Senate and do what we were elected to do: to deliberate, to legislate, to amend, to express different points of view but, ultimately, to enact laws that will make this a better nation.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Madam President, I want to salute a member of my staff before I make this statement. His name is Chris Homan. He has been with me a number of years. He has a special passion for people who are languishing in prisons around the world for so-called political crimes, and he has convinced me to make this my cause as well.

Time after time, we have been successful at seeing the release of these political prisoners simply by speaking on the floor and addressing the Embassies of the countries where they are imprisoned and trying to put some political pressure on the leaders of those countries to release those prisoners. You wouldn't believe that would work, would you, in an authoritarian regime, but it turns out it does, and over the years, we have been successful in helping many political prisoners be released. Today, I would like to address that topic again.

There are political prisoners languishing in jails around the world for nothing more than advocating for human rights and political freedom. These brave souls are often led to believe their efforts to push for freedoms are forgotten. I come to the floor today to tell them that is not the case.

Let me start with a particularly cruel and troubling set of cases: a Saudi writer, Raif Badawi, and his lawyer, Waleed Abulkhair. Badawi was arrested in 2012 for his peaceful writings, charged with apostasy, sentenced to 10 years in prison in 2012 and 1,000 lashes, at least 50 of which were carried out despite international uproar. Badawi suffers poor health, hypertension. His condition has worsened during 10 years in prison.

I had the honor of meeting his wife, Ensaf Haidar, here in Washington, DC, some years ago. She is living in exile in Canada with her young children after facing threats to her life in Saudi Arabia.

Badawi's lawyer, Waleed Abulkhair, a leading human rights activist, also was arrested in 2014 and sentenced to 10 years in prison and a 15-year travel ban.

As these two men near the latter years of their sentences, I once again appeal to the Government of the Saudis to free them. They have suffered enough.

I also call for the release of Filipina Senator Leila de Lima, who just spent her fourth year languishing in jail in the Philippines. This is a photo of her in her cell.

As a leading human rights advocate, she has criticized the actions of the President of her country, Rodrigo Duterte. From time to time, she writes from her cell. Let me share a short excerpt from this brave woman who, incredibly, after 4 years in confinement, still maintains her sense of humor. She wrote:

> Warm greetings from my detention quarters at the Philippine National Police Custodial Center, Camp Crame! . . . I do not know how long I will remain behind bars but there is one thing that I am sure of—my will to fight for what is right continues to be undeterred.

She is not alone. Many of us have spoken about Duterte's political harassment of Filipino journalist Maria Ressa, who received her 9th arrest warrant in November and 10th in January.

I have met with many in the Filipino American community in Illinois. We have a great, great community of Filipinos in the Chicagoland area and across the State. I know that they and colleagues here, like Senators MARKEY and LEAHY, will continue to support efforts to see a more accountable and democratic Philippines.

Lastly, let me turn to the United Arab Emirates, where one of the Nation's top human rights defenders, Ahmed Mansoor, also just passed his fourth year in jail. You see, Mansoor was arrested under the guise that his social media post advocating for human rights threatened the social harmony of the UAE. He is considered to be one of the last human rights defenders in the Emirates, one who peacefully advocates for freedom of expression, fair trials, and the humane treatment of prisoners.

Since his troubling sentencing in 2017, he has endured solitary confinement and cruel separation from his family. Despite the dismal conditions of his incarceration, he remains steadfast in his commitment to human rights, even conducting multiple hunger strikes in protest of jail conditions—the same conditions he spoke against before his detention. It is long overdue that Emiratis let this man go.

America's strength around the world comes not only from its military and its economy but also from the power of its ideals. I can tell you from the many former prisoners who have come to visit me over the years that the support of this body and this Congress and the American people, which we may just take for granted as another speech on the floor of the Senate, can make a difference. They have come to learn that someone actually mentioned their name on the floor of the U.S. Senate in Washington, DC. It sustains them. It encourages them. It gives them hope, and it puts pressure on the governments that jail them to justify and rationalize the cruel treatment that they are responsible for.

So let me remind Raif Badawi, Waleed Abulkhair, Senator Leila de Lima, Maria Ressa, and Ahmed Mansoor: You are not forgotten. We will continue to advocate for your freedom, and we hope that it comes someday soon.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF MARTIN JOSEPH WALSH

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, this pandemic has made it clearer than ever: It is not corporations that drive our economy; it is American workers.

With Marty Walsh, for whom we will vote in a moment on confirmation for the Department of Labor, workers will finally have someone on their side, as the Department that is supposed to look out for them. The Department of Labor is supposed to be the voice for workers in our government. It is their job to make sure workers' rights are protected, that people are safe on the job, that everyone can organize a union and get the overtime pay they have earned.

For 4 years, we have had a Department of Labor full of corporate lawyers. In fact, the Secretary of Labor was a corporate lawyer who made millions of dollars in court attacking labor unions and getting very well paid for it. That Department was full of people who made their careers fighting for corporate boards and CEOs, trying to squeeze every last penny out of workers and skirting labor laws.

And we saw the results. The DOL stopped fighting to raise the overtime pay threshold. In my State, tens of thousands of workers and, nationally, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of workers failed to get a raise as a result.

A year into the pandemic, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, OSHA, still has not issued an emergency temporary standard to protect workers from coronavirus. When 1,300 workers last year got sick at a Smithfield meatpacking plant, they fined the company a pathetic $10 per worker.

With Marty Walsh, that corporate infiltration of the Department of Labor ends now. Mayor Walsh will put the focus back where it should be: fighting for the people who make this country work.

We know that for far too many Americans, hard work doesn't pay off. They have seen corporate profits go up. They have seen executive compensation skyrocket. They have become

more productive in the workplace, and yet their wages are flat.

Hard work has never paid off for many Americans like it should. That is why voters sent a clear message in last year's election: They are tired of corporations running our economy.

Corporations have had their chance. They failed. If corporations won't deliver for their workers and create an economy where everyone's hard work pays off, with a middle class that is growing instead of shrinking, then we have to step in and fight for workers.

That is what Marty Walsh will do as the Secretary of Labor. He can work with OSHA to finally issue the emergency temporary standard, forcing corporations to take critical steps to protect their workers on the job. He can crack down on corporations that use subcontracting and independent contractors and other tricks to pay workers less and to deny them benefits.

He can get to work on a new overtime rule so that hundreds of thousands more workers will finally get the overtime pay that they have earned. He can defend workers' rights to organize to give them power in their workplace and crack down on corporate union busting.

And, as we know, Marty Walsh has the deep experience in the labor movement to get this done. Too many people in this town don't understand what it is like not to have a voice on the job, to have no power over your schedule, to work hard at a job that doesn't even pay the bills. They don't understand collective bargaining and the power that a union card gives you over your career and your finances and your future.

Marty Walsh does understand that. At the age of 21, he joined the Laborers' Union Local 223 in Massachusetts. He knows what a union means to workers. He knows what workers are up against when they organize.

Like President Biden, he is not afraid to talk about the labor movement, and he doesn't recoil from using the word ''union.'' He is not afraid to take on corporations that exploit their workers.

We already see that change in action. President Biden and Vice President HARRIS have joined Senator BOOKER and me and so many of us in standing in solidarity with Amazon workers organizing in Alabama.

Ultimately, it comes back to the dignity of work, the idea that hard work should pay off for everyone, no matter who you are, where you live, or what kind of work you do. Mayor Walsh understands that when work has dignity, people have power over their lives and their schedules—and they are paid a living wage. When work has dignity, everyone can afford healthcare and housing and childcare. They can save for retirement. They can take time off to care for their loved ones.

Mayor Walsh has lived those values. He successfully helped push his State to raise the minimum wage to $15. He cracked down on wage theft. He fought for paid family leave.

He knows how important it is for the people in the room making decisions to actually reflect the diverse workers who make our country successful. It is the job of the labor movement. It is the job of DOL to fight for all workers.

As we work to build back better with a big investment in American infrastructure, Mayor Walsh understands all of the opportunities for workers that come with that. He comes from the building trades. He understands that we can put hundreds of thousands of tradespeople to work building houses and schools and public transit, retrofitting homes and offices and schools. We have a tremendous opportunity to rebuild our economy with workers—not corporations but with workers—at the center.

If you love this country, you fight for the people who make it work. As Secretary of Labor, that is what Marty Walsh will do. I urge my colleagues to support him.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 883 and S. 885 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Ms. COLLINS. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FALSE CLAIMS ACT

Mr. GRASSLEY. A Civil War legislation called the False Claims Act has been on the books since that period of time. In 1986, I believe it was, I got some amendments to it that made it a much more valuable piece of legislation than it was before that time.

It is called the False Claims Act, and it has brought, I think, something like $64 billion back into the Federal Treasury of fraudulently taken money since then.

The problem today, even though it has been a successful law, is that the courts tend, from time to time, to neuter its capabilities by interpreting it in a way so it is not quite as effective. From time to time, we have passed legislation to overcome some of those court decisions.

I am here today to talk about another opportunity this Senate has to make the False Claims Act the effective piece of legislation it was.

So I want to alert my colleagues about the most recent limitations the courts have imposed on the False Claims Act.

The False Claims Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863, for the very same purpose it serves today: to fight fraud, not just with military matters, as was the reason for doing it because the Union Army was being defrauded at that particular time, but, today, it fights fraud governmentwide.

Today, it is the government's most powerful anti-fraud statute. That is because amendments that I offered in 1986 empowered whistleblowers to sue fraudsters on the government's behalf with or without the government's help. Since then, we have recovered more than $64 billion of taxpayer money lost to fraud.

Now, when we talk about anti-fraud statutes like the False Claims Act, we use the term ''materiality.'' It is because of that term that the courts have caused—their interpretation of that term has caused—the act to be less effective. The False Claims Act defines ''materiality'' as ''having a natural tendency of influencing the payment or receipt of money or property.'' Basically, if the government could have withheld payment, then it was likely material.

However, based on a 2016 Supreme Court opinion, the Federal courts are trying to reshape the act's materiality requirement. In the Supreme Court's opinion in Escobar, ''if the Government pays a particular claim in full despite its actual knowledge that certain requirements were violated, that is very strong evidence that those requirements are not material.''

Citing this language, other courts have made the government's payment decisions in these cases a deciding factor. Consequently, the Justice Department now shies away from prosecuting these cases. That is the case even when the fraud is very obvious and then, obviously, material.

Recently, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction briefed me on a report about a botched Defense Department effort to quickly buy cargo planes from an Italian manufacturer called Alenia.

In 2009, the Department of Defense bought 20 cargo planes from this company, Alenia, for $549 million. These planes were intended to move goods and train Afghan pilots. This is the type of plane we are talking about. The contract required the manufacturers to refurbish 20 retired aircraft and provide enough spare parts for 10 years of maintenance. To seal the deal, the company even took Department of Defense personnel on several warehouse tours to prove they had all these spare parts.

When the planes arrived in Afghanistan, mechanics quickly noted the planes were very poorly refurbished. Worse, they couldn't actually fly. The poor state of the planes and the hazards of the Afghan elements made that impossible. The company, Alenia, also lied about their maintenance commitments.

Now, remember, I already told you about their promise that those warehouses were full of parts for the next 10 years. These spare parts that they