

hasn't had that experience, when the intention, the good will, the honesty behind the words is distorted and twisted by millions of dollars from outside organizations that somehow want to destroy this woman.

I know Vanita Gupta. She is not just somebody I have a professional relationship with. I confess to the floor of the U.S. Senate, she has been my friend for years. I had occasion to talk to her dad, not during this time when she was nominated—months ago.

God, the stories he related about her, the pride that beamed through the telephone about her, about how he came from India with \$8 in his pocket, with an immigrant's dream, and now he gets to see his daughters living lives of service, and how his children were wired this way, to so appreciate this Nation as immigrants, to know that this Nation was formed around the highest ideals of humanity, and to see his two daughters pursuing the cause of our country to make this a more perfect Union around the ideals of liberty and justice. That is Vanita Gupta's life.

I have had private conversations with her for years about these issues that now she is being accused on. And she is not some radical partisan. She has a heart and a compassion for human beings that, to me, inspires my actions.

And this is what hurts the most because somehow I have seen it in our society, when a woman stands up and is strong and defiantly dedicated to ideals that are not made real in reality, they are attacked again and again and again. I have seen it in my own party between Presidential candidates. The treatment that the public and the press gives one who is the woman is far different than the same standards they put to the man.

And then—God bless America—there is something about women of color that seems to really get them outrageous attacks. I have seen it through my culture's history. They hunted Harriet Tubman. They despised Sojourner Truth. They belittled Rosa Parks.

There seems to be something about strength, something about talent, something about being willing to tell the truth that generates something, that tries to relegate Black women and women of color to be hidden figures in history.

I see it in every element of our country—even in the medical profession, for God's sake. Even when you control for income and education, Black women giving birth, their pain is not attended to; they are underestimated for the struggles they are in; and they die four times more often than White women.

So with this woman I have known for years, I have seen her in private and public. I have seen her go to work with Republicans, join arm in arm with them in bettering our country. I have seen her serve from her twenties and thirties. I have seen her be, in every step of her career, committed to our country, sacrifice for it.

Here we stand on the Senate floor. And I tell you, on the day after the verdict of George Floyd, where I saw other patriots tell the truth on the stand, police officers break with the waves of history, the streams and currents, to tell the truth, this is a moment that I have to tell the truth.

This is a good American, a great American, honest, committed, who has sacrificed for her country. And in a time of injustice still, where our jails and our prisons are filled with people who are hurt, when we, the land of the free, have one out of every four incarcerated people and, get this, one out of every three incarcerated women on the planet Earth in our jails and prisons—where almost 90 percent of them are survivors of sexual assault—this is the time we need more compassion; this is the time we need more empathy; this is the time we need more civic grace toward one another.

And Vanita embodies that. She stands for that in every fiber of her being. Her career echoes with that spirit. Should we confirm her to this position, I promise you here on the Senate floor before the flag of my country, she will do this Nation proud, committed. She will never mistake popularity for that purpose. She will never be distracted by the partisan games going on in the Capitol. She will be committed to the higher calling.

I ask my colleagues to step back for a moment and see the truth of who she is, who police organizations say she is, who prominent conservatives say she is, to see the person her dad says she is and elevate this incredible person, this incredible woman of color, to a position that desperately—to a nation that desperately needs this kind of leader.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I didn't come to the floor to speak to the nominee who is before us this afternoon, but following the very impassioned comments by my colleagues, in fairness, on both sides of the aisle and recognizing the vote that I just took about an hour ago to advance Vanita Gupta to this position, I will take just a moment to explain where I am coming from and why I will be supporting her final confirmation in just an hour.

I have looked at her record. I have had an extensive sitdown with her. I am impressed with not only her professional credentials but really the level of experience, but more to the comments that we just heard on the floor, the passion that she carries with her in the work that she performs.

I think it is fair to say we will all agree her confirmation has been very challenged. She has had significant back-and-forth in committee. She has been elevated with very strong rhetorical words in favor and, equally, words of condemnation.

I asked her point blank: Why do you want this? Is this worth it? Because this has been, clearly, very hard on her

as a nominee. She paused and reflected a moment and just spoke to how she feels called to serve in a very personal way that I thought was impactful.

We had a long discussion about some of the issues that I care deeply about in my State as they relate to justice, access to justice, public safety, and the real tragedy that we face when it comes to women, primarily our Native women, who experience rates of domestic violence and sexual assault that are shocking, disturbing, and wrong. Despite all that we have as a State, the resources we have, the opportunities we have, we have not been able to turn the corner as we have needed to in confronting what I believe is a true scourge.

It is going to take more than resources. Jurisdictionally, it is very complicated in Alaska. We don't have reservations. We don't have similar law enforcement presence in many parts of the State that you might have in the lower 48.

We have a great deal of work to do as a State. But as we discussed these issues, I felt that I was speaking to a woman who had not only committed a professional life to try to get to the base of these injustices, to try to not just direct a little bit of money, put a program in place, walk away, and call it a day, but to truly try to make a difference.

So there are some statements that she has made in some other areas that, in fairness, I find troubling and concerning, and part of my job will be to ensure that she understands clearly how this translates into issues in my State and with our particular issues. But I am going to give the benefit of the doubt to a woman who I believe has demonstrated through her professional career to be deeply, deeply committed to matters of justice. So I will be casting my vote in support of her in about an hour here.

SEMI ACT

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I came to the floor today to talk about something that has been top of my mind for a period of time, and I wanted to bring it to Members' attention today because of some recent articles of late as it relates to national security and global competitiveness, particularly as they relate to domestic resource development.

In recent months, since the beginning of this administration, I have spoken out in concern at the direction that I have seen the new administration take with regard to energy security and how that relates to Alaska. I have spoken out at length about my opposition to several of these Executive orders that were very early on relating to leasing and permitting moratoria in my State. In fact, there were eight specific orders that were directed to one State and to one State only. That is a pretty hard hit for Alaska.

In other areas, I don't believe that additional Federal lands and waters in Alaska should be placed off-limits. We

already as a State hold more public lands than any other State, and by considerable degree. I don't believe our public land order removal process should be paused.

This was an announcement that just came out of the Department of the Interior last week. They say they are pausing it, but effectively, it could be delayed or abandoned not just for these next 2 years going forward but permanently. What this effectively does is it creates almost de facto wilderness, if you will, because you have placed land in a limbo, in a purgatory for decades. Nobody can do anything with it as these PLOs, these public land orders remain in place.

I note—no great secret around here—like most Alaskans, I strongly support our resource development industry and the men and the women who work within it. They are my friends. They are my neighbors. I fish with them. I recognize the importance and the value of what they do. I have worked hard here in the Senate and for a long time to ensure that the industry's continued centrality is allowed to prosper, not only because of them, the people I know, but because of what it means for our country, for our economy, our State's budget, our prosperity, and also for our environment.

After years of lagging behind, the United States has come to a better place on energy in recent years. We have seen domestic production rising. We have seen our emissions falling. We have created jobs. We have generated revenues. We have changed the world geopolitically even as we have lessened our impact on the climate. But these kinds of gains can't be taken for granted. They can't be actively ignored. They certainly should not be discarded.

We have to acknowledge that this energy renewal has not been even across the country. It has taken place largely on State and private lands. We have very limited private land in Alaska. And in-state activity—we have been proudly producing for a while. But we also have, again, much land that is federally held, and we have only seen help arrive with any kind of activity and production on Federal land in the past few years. I would suggest that we cannot afford that forward progress to be reversed, but unfortunately that is the way it feels right now. The threat is that this administration is going to take an approach that is going to take us backwards.

So the question, I think, is a fair one for us to ask, to discuss here. It is an important question. What happens if we just decide we are going to turn our backs on this, our American energy? What happens if we really do move in this direction of just keeping it in the ground? What happens if we really do close our eyes to our domestic energy sources, these assets, if we close our eyes to the contributions that they provide?

I will suggest to you that there are a few warning signs that we have up on

the horizon. Oil prices are back up above \$60 a barrel. This actually helps my State; I will be honest there. We will accept that for budgetary purposes. But we all talk about what happens typically around Memorial Day. We have driving season coming on. We are still in the midst of a pandemic. But if the United States artificially restricts its supplies and demand rebounds rapidly, where does this put us?

I mentioned that there have been some articles of late that just really kind of struck me. It is interesting because I thought they were pretty significant, but it seems they are relatively unnoticed here in Washington.

According to Bloomberg, Russia has now supplanted Saudi Arabia to become the third largest supplier of crude oil in the United States. Canada is our No. 1. But there has been a series of circumstances. As our domestic production is falling, the Saudis have also reduced theirs, and it has been Venezuela. Venezuela is subject to sanctions. Their production has pretty much gone offline to the United States.

Part of what we are seeing, though, is the refusal on the Federal Government's side to approve cross-border pipeline infrastructure. Canada, again, is our largest—we import more from Canada than anywhere else, and they have greater capacity to help us out here so that we don't have to take it from Russia. But, instead, we haven't been able to take more from Canada to fill in that gap because of pipeline capacity. So what happens is, we are sending more of our money to Russia at a time when we are not on very good terms with Russia. Need we say elections? Need we say SolarWinds? Need we say what we are seeing from Putin?

This is what is happening: We are sending more of our dollars to Russia, and they are sending us more of the resources that we could produce here at home or perhaps at least import them from some friendlier nations.

U.S. crude oil production fell from an average high of 12.2 million barrels per day in 2019 to an average of 11.3 million in 2020. According to the Energy Information Administration, this loss in domestic production will return the United States to being a net petroleum importer in 2021 and 2022. By all accounts, a sizable chunk of this will come from Russia.

What is going to happen is, we are going to move from this position where we have been in these past few years where we have had some real energy security here because we have been producing, and we have been producing to the point that we have been able to even supply to our friends and allies. But now, with policies that are taking us in a different direction and still knowing that we need the resource, we are turning to Russia.

This is what really galls me so much: In 2020, the United States imported 538,000 barrels of oil per day from Russia. In Alaska—we recognize Alaska is a great producing State. Despite our

immense potential and desire to bring it to market, in 2020, we were producing an average of 448,000 barrels per day.

It just begs the question: Is this what we really want? Is this what we really want, for Russia to account for more of America's energy supply than Alaska? We both have similar environments, both big, but oil production goes on in areas that are tough to produce in. I will hold Alaska's environmental record over that of Russia any day—in fact, over most countries and even most States any day.

One article put it this way. They said: "America's increasing reliance on Russian oil is at odds with U.S. energy diplomacy."

Let's kind of put it in context. The position that we have taken with Nord Stream 2—basically what we have said is that we are asking those in Europe who need Russia's gas—we are saying we need to be tough on this. We need to break Russia's hold here. For all the years—it has been 7 years since Russia annexed Crimea and demonstrated to the world that they are not afraid to flex their muscles when it comes to energy exports in order to achieve their geopolitical goals.

So we have been saying on Nord Stream 2: Europe, you guys, don't go there. Yet we have to look at ourselves here because we are telling Europe "Limit your reliance on Russia for gas," but over here, we are happy to step up our imports from Russia on oil.

The President has just recently imposed tougher sanctions on Russia, as he absolutely should, but I think we need to be eyes wide open here, folks, in terms of what it means when we need that resource.

I do recognize that much of this discussion on Russia and how Russia has supplemented Venezuelan crude—I recognize that most of the oil that is being imported is heavy and that this is a situation with our gulf coast refineries that are specifically geared for that. I do recognize that they have fewer options right now, but I do think this is a conversation that we need to be talking about. We just can't sit back and say: Well, this is just the way it is.

Congress and the administration need to be taking the steps necessary to ensure that we in this country have a strong, stable supply of domestic energy to meet our current demand, our future demand, and, to the greatest extent possible, the demand from our allies.

Russia is positioning itself to capitalize on all of that. They produce from wherever they want, and they are going to sell to wherever they can.

The least that we can do here at home is to support our own responsible production from States like Alaska, so that we have our supply—our own supply—and can provide a diversified commercial alternative.

Moving from oil and gas briefly here, Alaska is also ready to help in another increasingly crucial area and that is

with mineral development. Our history of tectonic events has created a geological environment that fosters deposits of a wide variety of minerals that are critical to both our current and our future economies.

Back in 2018, the Department of the Interior designated 35 “critical” minerals based on their importance to our economy and security, as well as their susceptibility to supply and disruption. These minerals are essential for everything. They help us with our advanced missile systems, solar panels, batteries for electric vehicles, your cell phones—everything. Our military is certainly aware of this. They recognize the vulnerable position that we are in. Our manufacturers recognize the vulnerability. These are products that we use on a daily basis.

Right now, the United States is import-reliant on 31 of the 35 minerals designated as “critical.” We have relatively no domestic production. We rely completely on imports to meet our demand for 14 of these. And, of course, most of where we are importing these materials are from China. That is not OK. That shouldn’t be acceptable to us. I think we all should agree on the need to rebuild our domestic mineral supply chains. There has been good, positive conversation about what we can do.

I feel this is one of those areas that is a growing vulnerability. It used to be that we would talk about our vulnerability on the Middle East for our oil, and then policies changed and we reduced our reliance on that. That is why I am anxious. I am concerned about what I am seeing translate going forward. But I think we need to be, again, with eyes wide open when it comes to our mineral dependence and our reliance on these important materials for what we need to be a strong nation.

I think this is a pressing and long-term security threat that we face in this country. We have seen it play out in light of the COVID pandemic. We have seen the vulnerability of international supply chains. I thought it was great. It was so important that the administration really focused in on this. The new administration is focusing on this in a good way, and I appreciate that.

When President Biden released the first part of his infrastructure proposal, focusing on international domestic supply chains, he has one section there about electric vehicles. In the White House fact sheet, it says the plan “will enable automakers to spur domestic supply chains from raw materials to parts, retrofit factories to compete globally, and support American workers to make batteries and EVs.”

This is the type of policy that we should all want to get behind, broadened out to every industry, not just to a select few. But the question here, though, is whether the administration is willing to accept what is going to be necessary in order to achieve this goal to have these secure supply chains, especially when it comes to expanding

our domestic supply of raw materials. It is going to require approval of mining projects, and that has been a challenge for us. That has been a challenge for us.

This is where I go to another article that came up a few weeks back. This is from Reuters. It appears to me that rather than looking within our own borders, the administration is looking beyond. In this article from Reuters, it states that the United States looks to Canada for minerals to build electric vehicles. It provides:

The U.S. Government is working to help American miners and battery makers expand into Canada, part of a strategy to boost regional production of minerals used to make electric vehicles and counter Chinese competitors.

It goes on further to talk about the different ways that the Department of Commerce is discussing with many how we can boost Canadian production of EV materials. It goes on further to say:

But Washington is increasingly viewing Canada as a kind of “51st State” for mineral supply purposes.

I am a big fan of Canada. They are our neighbor, but if we are going to be adding Canada as a 51st State to help us with our minerals and access to minerals, let’s not forget the 49th State, because Alaska has good, strong resources. Where we seem to have problems is in gaining access, whether it is in the permitting process or just the ability to move forward with some of our mineral potential.

Again, I am not suggesting that we shouldn’t be looking to our friends to build these alliances, particularly with our neighbors directly to the north and to the south. This is good. I am not suggesting: Let’s not be talking to Canada.

That is an important part of how we really work to build these secure supply chains. All I am suggesting is that we here in America need to also look to the strength of our resource assets.

There are some—again, the issue of mining in this country sometimes can be a controversial one. I am going to suggest to folks that if we really want to do more to build out not only our national security but if we want to build out our clean, diverse energy infrastructure, moving toward the President’s vision of greater renewable opportunities, which I want to do, let’s acknowledge that we are going to need these minerals. We don’t really have a choice here.

The World Bank recently released a report looking at “The Mineral Intensity of the Clean Energy Transition.” They found that “large relative increases in demand of up to nearly 500 percent are estimated for certain minerals, especially those concentrated in energy storage technologies, such as lithium, graphite, and cobalt.” The report also found that “even with large increases in recycling—including scenarios where 100 percent end of life recycling is achieved—there is still likely to be strong demand for primary minerals.”

We know we are going to need it. People like Elon Musk last year said: “Please mine more nickel.” He promised: “Tesla will give you a giant contract for a long period of time if you mine nickel efficiently and in an environmentally sensitive way.”

I am with you on that.

Look at the analysis from Goldman Sachs, which found that increasing demand for electric car batteries is causing automakers to brace for a surge in prices in lithium, cobalt, and nickel.

In order for us to get there from here, in order to achieve a transition to renewable and cleaner technologies, we have to acknowledge that there is going to be a mineral footprint. It will be impossible to establish a robust domestic supply chain for EVs and batteries if we continue to import the raw materials from other nations, including some that continue to dramatically outcompete us in these areas every year.

I think we need a rational, clear-headed, eyes-wide-open approach to energy and mineral development. We don’t want to go backward on energy, and we can’t be caught flatfooted on minerals. We have the resources. We have the highest labor standards in the world and the highest environmental standards in the world. Our energy workers and our miners will hold themselves to those standards. Instead of importing more from places like Russia and China, we need to free ourselves from them to the extent that we can establish ourselves as this global alternative.

I have kind of taken that—actually, it is not something new. In the beginning of the 116th Congress, I prepared a white paper. We called it “The American and Global”—well, what we called it was a pretty cool title. It is a great little publication that should have gotten more notice, but like a good wine, it comes with time: “With Powers So Disposed,” America and the Global Strategic Energy Competition.”

I outline in this a strategic energy initiative designed to sharpen and direct our tools of energy related to economic statecraft and to enhance the geopolitical position of the country.

From that or as a jump-off from that, I am introducing my Strategic Energy and Minerals Initiative Act, which we call the SEMI Act. This legislation will enable U.S. companies to better compete in global markets, and it promotes the responsible domestic production of our oil, gas, and minerals. I think these are initiatives that are good for us to be looking critically at, again, as we move forward with this administration’s priorities on not only how we can build infrastructure—build it better, build it cleaner, build it with a renewable future—but we have to recognize that when we build things, we need base elements.

Know that Alaska is ready, willing, and able to play a role on all of these fronts. We have tremendous stores of

resources, but equal to those tremendous stores of resources is the responsibility that I believe Alaskans feel to be good stewards as we access those resources to allow for a level of sustainability, whether it is with our fisheries or whether it is with the subsistence, the livelihoods of those who rely on the food and animals on the land. We believe that we can contribute to our national security and our global competitiveness, while at the same time working to protect the environment, but what we need is a chance to be able to do that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from Iowa.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, when you hear the word “infrastructure,” what comes to mind? For folks across Iowa, it is roads; it is bridges, locks and dams, ports, waterways, and broadband. But according to the Biden administration, infrastructure is now a buzzword that encompasses just about every item on the progressive wish list. As a result, the President’s infrastructure proposal takes a very sharp left turn by including everything from elements of the socialist Green New Deal to higher taxes on American workers.

Some of my Democratic colleagues are even urging the President to include a pathway to citizenship for millions of undocumented immigrants in the infrastructure package.

How about we make the wall on our southern border infrastructure?

Probably to no one’s surprise, once again, the Senate majority leader is plotting to pass the bill in a totally partisan process.

Folks, we really need to pump the brakes. The Democrats are steering us the wrong way on this issue. Infrastructure is an issue that has always enjoyed broad bipartisan support in Congress.

We may disagree on how much to spend or how to pay for the costs, but we all agree that maintaining and improving our roads, bridges, ports, and waterways is one of the most important roles of the Federal Government’s. There is no reason to drive us apart on such an important issue that typically brings us together and impacts all of our States.

But President Biden is on a one-way street to more gridlock. Only about 5 to 6 percent of the \$2.2 trillion of the Biden proposal is dedicated to roads and bridges. The Biden plan spends less fixing potholes and repairing roads than it does on promoting electric vehicles and perks for the coastal elites who drive them, and you had better believe that this could have a devastating impact on Iowa’s ethanol and biodiesel industries, which support our States’ local economies. Even the liberal Washington Post is taking issue with the Democratic administration’s claim that 19 million jobs will be created by the proposal. The real number is less than 3 million. Each job created by this

so-called American Jobs Act will cost our taxpayers \$865,000, and because American workers will bear the brunt of the higher taxes in the Biden plan, that will mean lower wages. These costs are sure to give taxpayers road rage.

There is no reason to take this radical left turn. Last Congress, the Democrats and the Republicans on the Senate’s Environment and Public Works Committee, which I serve on, worked together to unanimously pass out of committee an important infrastructure bill to help fix our roadways. This highway bill provides us with a great starting point to move us forward in the right direction—toward a bipartisan infrastructure plan. This 5-year, \$287 billion bill was the largest highway bill in history, and it was supported by Senators from across the political spectrum who represented States from Vermont and New York to Alabama, Mississippi, and, of course, Iowa.

In hailing from a very rural part of Iowa, I am all for looking at ways to invest in broadband expansion, to support our roadways, and to make sure we have the right infrastructure in place to combat flooding in my home State. Those are true infrastructure needs and are the ones that I believe would get strong bipartisan support in a 50-50 Senate, but by throwing in progressive policy wish list items and non-infrastructure-related provisions, the Biden plan is headed down a dead-end street.

The President needs to do a U-turn and start working with the Republicans on a bipartisan roadmap for America. By putting aside the partisan pet projects—projects like the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor Project—and picking up where we left off, with the unanimously bipartisan highway bill, we can steer the infrastructure bill into the passing lane under the Senate’s regular order.

So, folks, let’s come together and literally start building some bipartisan bridges.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to talk also about infrastructure and associate myself with the interest that the country has in infrastructure.

In fact, one of the things that the government has done the longest has been roads and bridges and canals. I think, initially, the term “internal improvements” was, in the early 19th century, what they would have talked about when they talked about what we began to talk about later as “infrastructure.” During almost the entire history of the country, there was an understanding of what “infrastructure” meant in America.

Infrastructure is pretty popular, and infrastructure is definitely something that you generally can’t do for yourself. You can’t, on your own, provide the waterline that connects your house

to the next house. On your own, you can’t provide the road that gets you from home to work. On your own, you can’t do a lot of things that we did early on and up until right now and call them infrastructure. Normally, they were seen as things like roads and bridges and dams—big projects that sometimes crossed State lines—or big projects that sometimes were just too big for a State or a town to handle, like water systems that needed to be improved.

When we did that—and I will talk later about the way we did that—the bipartisan agreement also largely led to figuring out ways that infrastructure would pay for itself, in that the people who used the infrastructure would pay for the infrastructure, and we looked at that in a number of different ways.

Now, in the package that the administration has proposed, the \$2.3 trillion package, there are lots of things in there that I don’t disagree that the Senate should debate or I don’t even rule out of hand that the country might want to do. Yet I think they are not infrastructure, and the funding way to get to them makes it harder to have the kind of bipartisan agreement that, I think, we could have in an infrastructure bill. The Republicans are for it, and the Democrats are for it in the House, in the Senate. Let’s talk about how to get there.

Let’s also make the point, of the \$213 billion in this plan that is for Green New Deal building makeovers, there may be a place to do that, and it is something that we could clearly debate, but it is not the same thing as infrastructure. I was, at one time, the chairman of the Missouri Housing Development Commission. We did a lot of things to make it possible for people to have houses or for people to have buildings that they could have an opportunity to be a part of, but we never really called it infrastructure, and we did it in a different way.

On surface transportation, generally, for decades, that was paid by the highway trust fund. How did you fund the highway trust fund? You funded the highway trust fund by people pulling up to service stations and putting fuel in their cars, and when they did that, they paid into the highway trust fund. The more miles you drove, the more you paid into the highway trust fund, and Americans thought that was fair. We haven’t raised the highway gas tax since 1993, and that could very well be a debate we should have as part of an infrastructure package. If not the gas tax, what other kind of user fee could there be? Lots of people use the highways, the roads, the bridges, and the Interstate Highway System who don’t pay a gas tax now because they are transitioning to vehicles like electric vehicles that don’t fill up at that gas pump.

That is a debate I think we should have as part of an infrastructure debate. Just last year, it was predicted