Then, 15. I had no idea where she was, and, at the time, barely even knew who she was. All I knew was that on her first day, as not just a volunteer but a full-time employee, our latest hire was ridiculously late to pick me up to drive me to the next campaign stop. Not a great look for her first task on the job.

Twenty minutes passed. Then, 25. Then, 30. She still wasn't there.

Her name was Kaitlin ''Something,'' I remembered. Well, whenever Kaitlin ''Something'' deigned to show up—if Kaitlin ''Something'' deigned to show up at all—she would get a lesson in working for a former military officer who believed in the sanctity of clocking in at 0855 hours if your commanding officer told you to report at 0900 hours.

Thirty-five minutes went by. Then, 40.

It was only after 45 minutes had passed that I saw her car coming around the bend. And while I could not have noted at the time, Kaitlin ''Something'' was about to become one of the most important people in my life. But on that day, she made me miss an event because we were too late.

In the 15 years since that day that she showed up so incredibly late, Kaitlin Fahey has gone from being an intern to being in charge of interns, to, well, being in charge of me as my scheduler and then as my chief of staff.

She has become a trusted political adviser, a confidant, a close friend, and an honorary member of my family—someone I knew I could turn to for a gut check and for the most brutally honest advice, the person who can both calm me down and rev me up and who can switch between the two on a dime.

From greasy fast food stops along campaign routes to the hallowed halls of the Capitol Building that I am speaking in today, Kaitlin has never left my corner. She has always pushed for what was good and right, for what was best not just for me but for the people I represented—never, ever accepting the word ''no'' when a ''yes'' might be better to help even one family in one far-flung town of our home State of Illinois.

Day after day, year after year, in role after role, she worked tirelessly, not on my behalf but on behalf of every Illinoisan, every American, proving along the way that you don't need to wear a nation's uniform to serve our country; that you can serve America without ever going to basic training or picking up a rifle; that you can serve America, and change her forever and for the better, simply by caring deeply and working tirelessly to make tomorrow a little bit better, a little fairer than today.

There are a million stories I could tell about the work that Kaitlin has done and all that she has accomplished, but I will hold myself to just one: when she helped change Senate rules to allow babies onto the floor for votes so that new parents could fulfill their duties to both their children and the Constitution, showing moms and dads in every pocket of this country that they shouldn't need to choose between having jobs and having kids.

You can see why I call her ''The Hammer'' and why she is one of the only people in the world who scares the living daylights out of me, but in the best way possible. And you can also see why I have been so lucky to have her in my corner all these years, to have her as a partner in office pranks, and to have her as a sister, who I could count on to simply sit in silence on the other end of the phone and cry with me after my miscarriage.

This month was Kaitlin's last as my chief of staff. So, today, I just want to say thank you to her.

Thank you to Kaitlin's wonderful family also—Scott, Ronan, and Brenna—for lending us your wife and your mom.

And thank you, Kaitlin, for every moment of the last 15 years. Thank you for imparting your humor and for humoring me, for showing that warmth and strength can be one in the same, for not quitting when I tried to get you to wear a wedding dress made out of camouflage material, or when I got the office to take part in ''Talk like a Pirate Day'' and do every memo in ''Pirate.'' Thank you for being the kind of person who would jump out of a car and run out into the middle of the street to help save a lost dog—which she actually just did this past election day.

Thank you for keeping me in line and for building our team from the ground up, running our office—first in the House and then in the Senate—with grace, precision, and brilliance; prioritizing empathy and compassion, common sense, and common decency; wearing a million hats all at once yet always making sure our staff felt valued, heard, and ever able to serve the people of Illinois. Thank you for being my ''Hammer.''

I don't thank you for not letting me get a Margarita machine for the office, however. But I also thank you for being my friend, for showing up to drive me in your car that day, albeit 45 minutes late. You were worth waiting for every one of those minutes. I love you.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I have had the privilege to represent the great State of Oklahoma and the people of Oklahoma, to be able to sit in multiple Presidential addresses in the House of Representatives Chamber.

At that joint address that happened last night, I didn't have the privilege to actually get a chance to sit in on. As, clearly, anyone who watched the speech saw that there were 200 people in a room designed for 1,600 people, with the spacing and all of the things that were happening there. In some ways it seemed normal, and some ways it seemed ridiculous with the room of 200 vaccinated people all spaced out. But that is a different story for a different moment.

For that speech last night, as I listened, I thought about the other speeches that I have listened to as well. Many of these speeches are similar. The President comes and casts a vision. Says these are things that they want to be able to do, talk through different programs, talk through different tax issues, talk through where we are as a country, cast a vision. I get all of those things.

Last night, and every night, when one of those speeches occurs, there is usually something unique or different about the speech. It is a little different direction for where they want to go. Not all those programs will get implemented. I had people already contacting my office, panicked in some ways, saying: Are all those things going to be done? And I can smile at them and say: No, all those things won't be done, because it never is. It is a vision that is cast by the President that they have to convince the American people and Congress to be able to engage with as well.

But last night was epic in the sense of spending. I was even surprised at the amount that we are talking about at this point, and it seems to be just so flippant and normal at this point.

When you do the math of what just happened with the American Rescue Plan, that was just under $2 trillion of spending. Last night, one of the proposals was also about $2 trillion, and another one was about $2.5 trillion. So take those together—just over $6 trillion in proposed and spent government debt just in those three recommended.

What people aren't adding to this is that starting in June, in July, it is appropriations time. Our best understanding—we haven't received the budget from the White House yet—is that proposal will be about $4.5 trillion. So adding together what happened in the first 100 days and what is about to happen in the next 100 days that we already see coming, is a proposal to spend, this year, $11 trillion—$11 trillion. That far exceeds what was even spent during the pandemic time period, when we all determined that this is a rainy day that we definitely need to be able to help stabilize our economy—$11 trillion.

The size of government, the number of times that I heard, ''If there is a problem, government here in Washington, DC, can solve it''—it was epic.

Now, initially, at the beginning of the speech, there was a lot of talk about COVID, as well there should be. Our Nation is coming through this. But I was surprised how little conversation there was about the vaccines and the process, Operation Warp Speed, and the partnership between government and private industry that was done last year to be able to bring all these vaccines to place.

You see, all the vaccines were developed and ordered last year. All the needles and the alcohol wipes and the materials—the PPP that would be needed—were all ordered last year. This year was just a matter of getting shots in arms, which I am incredibly grateful we have had so many Americans that have stepped up and driven up, come and put their arm out there and said I want to be part of this solution for getting rid of COVID in our country.

Everyone knew that as we got shots in arms, we would see the numbers come down—at least we hoped. And we did. The numbers are coming down, and the economy is coming back up. That is the other thing that everyone predicted, as well—that as soon as some of the shutdowns happened, we would begin to see the economy begin to rise again, and, thankfully, we are.

It was interesting to be able to hear the President last night take credit for all that, which I assume every President sitting in that spot would. But I am grateful to President Trump and the leadership that happened in HHS and the work of career folks and the folks who are in science and private industry and pharmaceuticals and what they have done over the last year because it is remarkable what we actually have walked through and what we have seen.

What was not mentioned last night when talking about the economy is unemployment insurance. It is something I brought to this body before. When I traveled around my State the week before Easter and the week after Easter when we were not voting those 2 weeks—as I traveled around, every employer I talked to said the same thing: We are hiring, but we don't have people applying, or people who are applying are coming in and just applying and filling out a form, and when they offer them the job, they are saying: I don't want the job. I just need to be able to bring the completed form back to the unemployment office so I can continue to get my check.

I talked to employees who were frustrated because the person who used to work next to them is not showing up for work anymore because they are home getting unemployment benefits because the unemployment benefits in my State right now far exceed what the normal wage is. People aren't showing up. That is a problem in our economy.

My fear is that is a problem that is going to continue all the way until September because the unemployment benefits that were extended were extended all the way through the first week of September. Even though we pushed back and said this is a bad idea, the Democratic colleagues and the President said: No, let's keep moving forward.

There are lots of parts of the Green New Deal that were presented last night, but they didn't use the term ''Green New Deal.'' It was bits and pieces of elements of the Green New Deal separated in different sets of the ideas. The term ''Green New Deal'' has become very, very unpopular with folks as they find out what it is. Taking pieces of the Green New Deal, separating them in different spots, and trying to pass them doesn't change anything either.

I was surprised how little the President really talked about what is going on in the crisis at the border. He did mention it, and I was pleased to see that. Many people in my State really see that as a very serious issue that needs to be resolved. Our open borders right now and the literally hundreds of thousands of people who have crossed our border illegally just this calendar year, just in the last 100 days, is record levels.

I talked to the Border Patrol folks, and they talked about how in March alone, they had 172,000 encounters. It is a record number. But now in April, they are hitting or exceeding that record, just in April, again because the numbers continue to skyrocket to numbers we have not seen. The number of unaccompanied minors is at a 20-year high. We have not seen these numbers in decades.

It is a significant issue for us as a country. It is one that started on January 20 with the change in policy and issues.

We have more than 5,000 individuals who have been picked up by Border Patrol just this year who have a criminal record in the United States.

We have 15,000 individuals whom Border Patrol has just released into the country with no notice to appear at all, just a statement as they come through. The line was so long that Border Patrol leadership was telling them, from Washington, DC, that if the line gets too long, just release people into the country and tell them to check in with immigration folks in whatever part of the country they go to. Just check in. Literally, if they are coming across the border and the line is too long, just let them go and tell them to check themselves in when they get to wherever they are going in the country—15,000 people like that just this year.

We have 150,000 people whom Border Patrol has reported that they saw crossing the border, but they literally didn't have the manpower to even get to them, what they call ''got aways''—150,000 this year who won't show up in anyone's numbers of people entering the country illegally.

These numbers are truly epic numbers.

Last night, the President's proposal was to allow us to do more in Central America and eventually this will get better. I would tell you from being down at the border three times just this year and interacting with folks, I would encourage anyone from the administration to go to the border and actually see what is going on and actually talk to law enforcement there. From being down in that area, their concern is that this is a very long-term issue because the administration doesn't seem to see it as a crisis or something that has to be fixed immediately; it can be fixed eventually, with hundreds of thousands of people coming across the border now every month.

In the last official report from Customs and Border Protection and Border Patrol, there were over 100 different countries represented by the individuals crossing the border just this year—over 100 countries. It is not just folks from Central America. Literally, people from all over the world are paying the cartels the money it takes to get through Mexico and traveling into our country and checking in or skipping across the border, and they disappear into our economy. I see that as an issue. I wish the administration would see that as an issue.

A conversation that came up last night was about voting. It is an important conversation for us. We are a representative republic. Voting is extremely important to us as a nation; that every vote counts and that every vote has the integrity that it needs. But with S. 1 and on the House side, what they call H.R. 1, I am stunned at the contents of that bill.

When President Biden said: Just pass that bill and put it on my desk, I thought, there is absolutely no way I would pass a bill like that; nor would the people at home even want me to pass a bill like that.

That is a bill that is intentionally designed to make voting easy and cheating easy. We want to make voting easy and cheating hard. That is the way we have done elections for a very long time. Why would we want to shift from that? I am all for making voting as easy as we can. My State has early voting. It has mail-in voting and all the characteristics you want to have to protect the integrity of the vote so when it is over, everyone can look at it and say: My person won or lost, but I trust the integrity of the vote. It has all those elements.

We worked very hard to make sure every community in every area has access to voting and doesn't have long lines and make sure we get to mail out ballots and all those things to be able to not only give the opportunity for people to vote but to protect the integrity of the vote.

S. 1 and H.R. 1 does things like same-day registration but also removes voter ID. You partner those two together, and that is a recipe for double-voting and fraud. You can't have those two together.

It mandates a third-party collection of ballots that could be done in any State. Individual political groups could literally go door-to-door and say: Have you voted yet? If you haven't, come out on the porch right now. I will stand with you, and we can vote together, and then I will turn your ballot in for you.

That violates everything we have done in voting about secret ballots and about the integrity of the ballot, and

only the folks in the post office would handle it or the folks in the polling place would handle it. Now, this is a third party whom no one has any connection to nor accountability to who can randomly grab ballots and collect them. How do we not think there won't be fraud in that system?

It also takes away all voter IDs in every State, including my State, where there is not even a complaint about voter IDs on either side of the aisle because it is an incredibly fair system. It doesn't require a driver's license. It can require any piece of paper or any way to be able to show you are who you are. We have a straightforward system to be able to protect not only the integrity of the ballot but to make sure every person is not only allowed to vote but is encouraged to vote. Why would we take that away from places where it is already working and there hasn't been a complaint just because someone in Washington, DC, says we shouldn't do it?

Centralized control of voting in Washington, DC, seemed to be part of the theme of the night last night, where it was, everything would work better if it only came to DC. I tell you, I have met a lot of smart people in DC, but I can also tell you that I know a lot of smart people in Oklahoma who love their neighbors, who want to see the right thing done, who care about people in their community and in their State. And this sudden belief that if we are going to get things done right, we have to bring it to Washington, DC, and allow the folks in Washington, DC, to be able to run it, I will tell you, the folks in my State would shake their heads and say: We are doing OK. Let us take care of our neighbors at home, and don't make us sign a paper every time we want to do something and send it off to somebody we never met in Washington, DC.

This growing in size of our Federal Government is not a goal for me. Being efficient, protecting the rights of every American, protecting our national security—those are goals. They don't require federalizing everything.

I can tell you a couple of areas where last night really had some shining moments for me, though. President Biden, twice in his speech, literally reached out to Republicans and said: I understand Republicans have another idea on this. Let's sit down and talk.

That was a good moment. Quite frankly, for the last—let's say of a 100-day Presidency so far, for 90 days of that, we have gotten the Heisman from the President and his team, saying: We have got this; we don't need you. Then in the last really 10 days or so, the White House has started reaching out some. And to be able to hear President Biden last night say: We understand Republicans have a different idea; let's sit down and visit—that almost sounds like governing. That would be a great shift for us, to be able to sit down and talk these things through.

Republicans aren't opposed to infrastructure. How absurd to be able to make infrastructure a partisan issue. We have always done infrastructure together. It is not like any of us are opposed to highways and to waterways and to clean drinking water and to broadband. There are key aspects that are core to infrastructure. Let's continue to be able to do those. Let's do them efficiently and wisely. That is all that we would ask.

I am pleased the President actually reached out and said: Let's start sitting down to be able to talk these things through, because that will allow us to be able to work together toward a better solution.

The second big moment for me last night was listening to my friend and colleague TIM SCOTT speak about his family, speak about a vision for the country, to be able to challenge the country and to be able to challenge this body to be able to do what he called commonsense finding common ground. It is a great idea.

We have different perspectives across the aisle in this building. That doesn't mean we can't sit down as Americans and be able to work them out. As TIM SCOTT reminded us, part of the story of America is a story of redemption. We can do that together.

TIM also challenged this Nation to stop politicizing race, to stop saying over and over again that because we disagree, it is because we are racist. TIM spoke to the Nation and said there are real issues of race out there, and you cheapen it when you politicalize every issue and say it is because you are racist.

Let's actually sit down and disagree on issues as Americans, and let's resolve those things together. We have common ground, and we have areas of real disagreement. I had lots of areas where I disagree with President Biden, but I am willing to sit down and lay out a set of ideas that I think are a much better option. Let's talk it out. That is what we do. But let's resolve these issues in the days ahead.

And no, you are right, I am not going to give on the Second Amendment. I am not going to give on issues of life and the value of every child. I am not going to give on—I think the debt and deficit is a very important issue. I am not going to give on encouraging the value of work for every single person and every single family. There are areas I am not going to give on, but we should at least sit down and treat each other with dignity and respect, and let's talk it out.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). The Senator from Alaska.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 593

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation be discharged from further consideration of S. 593 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the Murkowski amendment at the desk be agreed to; the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Madam President, we talked a lot about the pandemic and all that it has brought. I would like to take just a few moments here, at the outset, before I ask for full consideration, to share with colleagues, very briefly, what we have faced in the State of Alaska with regard to our State's economy. We have probably taken a greater hit than any State in the country.

We saw a 32-percent drop in revenue last year, 10 percent higher than any other State in the Nation. We are starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel, and that is good, but we are also facing the prospect of another devastating tourist season.

Back home, right now, people are not talking about the season for 2021 coming up. The motto is ''Get through to '22.'' That is an awful way to be approaching our situation so they have asked for help. They realize that anything that we can do to try to salvage even a few weeks of the tourist season is going to be important to us.

So Senator SULLIVAN and I have been working on behalf of hundreds of small businesses that rely on this essential income just so they can scrape by for another year. A lot of people don't think about cruise ships as being an essential activity during a pandemic but, let me tell you, in our State, where so much of our economy is based on tourism, it is an imperative. It is jobs; it is livelihoods; and it really is what allows our small communities to keep their doors open.

In 2019, before the pandemic was upon us, we were looking at 1.33 million tourists who came to the State of Alaska by way of cruise ship. That is pretty significant. In 2020, there were 48 passengers. That is 48 passengers. That is not 48,000. So, in other words, you had an economy that was looking pretty strong and pretty good, and it absolutely went into a free fall.

Normally, the tourism industry generates more than $214 million in State and municipal revenue, more than $1.4 billion in payroll, $2.2 billion in visitor spending, and the prospect was doing nothing but going up until we were hit in 2020. The vastly diminished cruise season contributed to statewide unemployment rising from 6.2 percent to 11 percent. Southeast Alaska had greater unemployment, which increased from 4.7 to 11.3—17 percent of all jobs in the region impacted.

This kind of unemployment and this kind of stress is an extraordinary challenge. So Alaskans are trying to figure out is there a way to salvage there, and there are two points here.

We are ready to welcome visitors back in the State. We are leading the country in vaccination rates. Half of