

March, it has been clear that the left's definition of the word is evolving faster than even some Democrats can actually keep up with. Medicaid expansion is now infrastructure, paid leave is now infrastructure, and job-killing tax increases to hold the assortment all together.

At every step of the way, Republicans have focused on targeted investments in roads, bridges, airports, waterways, and broadband infrastructure the American people actually need.

But yesterday, President Biden showed that his patience for the smart, bipartisan approach was wearing thin. He directed Democratic leaders in Congress to get ready to ram through more expansive, unrelated spending unilaterally.

Meanwhile, Senator CAPITO and our colleagues on the EPW Committee continue to demonstrate that bipartisan infrastructure investment is actually still within reach.

In April, the Senate passed their water infrastructure bill by a count of 89 to 2. And just a couple weeks ago, the committee reported out a historic investment to surface transportation, and they did it unanimously. It is disappointing that President Biden has been unwilling to follow the Senate's productive example.

And now some of our colleagues have signaled that they intend to use this month to depart from that example, themselves. The Democratic leader has laid out a partisan agenda he seems to hope will illustrate that the Senate is somehow broken.

Remember, the Senate is 50-50-50-50. The American people did not hand the Democrats a mandate in the Senate. This series of radical proposals has no chance of becoming law, but every intention of justifying reckless changes to the way the body actually operates—plans to jam hospitals, schools, and small businesses with new high-stakes tests of “wokeness,” to dramatically curtail Americans' right to keep and bear arms, and, of course, to tip the scales of our electoral system permanently in their favor.

Yesterday, the radical parade began with an attempt to use the cause of paycheck fairness as cover for placing unprecedented new legal burdens on American employers. Wage discrimination on the basis of sex has been illegal for 60 years. Wage discrimination on the basis of sex has been illegal for 60 years. What Democrats proposed yesterday was to kick down carefully constructed protections to leave even the smallest American business at risk of unlimited liability in workplace cases—listen to this—even where malice plays no part. Their bill would force workers to opt out of, rather than into, class-action suits—in other words, a gift-wrapped bonanza for the trial bar. Unsurprisingly, that gambit not only failed to pass; it failed to even unite a majority of the Senate.

So if our colleagues intended to actually earn support for consensus steps

on paycheck fairness, they might have considered subjecting their proposal to scrutiny through the normal legislative process—perhaps a markup or even a committee hearing.

Well, apparently when your agenda is designed to fail, regular order is just a waste of time.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. President, now on an entirely different matter, I have been outspoken on the importance of sustaining America's support for local partners who are leading counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere, even when doing so has put me at odds with the Presidents, actually, of both parties.

When the previous administration considered precipitous withdrawals from Afghanistan and Syria, I sponsored a bipartisan amendment warning that doing so could “allow terrorists to regroup . . . to the detriment of United States interests and those of our allies.”

Dozens of Senate Democrats joined the measure at that point.

Last year, the Congress overrode veto threats and put explicit restrictions and reporting requirements on force drawdowns in the annual Defense authorization act. I and others voted to override the veto of a Republican President. The goal wasn't to tie the hands of the Commander in Chief. It was to force the administration to seriously address the risks to U.S. interests posed by any potential withdrawal.

But this spring, when President Biden announced his intention to abandon the battlefield in Afghanistan completely—completely—without a plan, there was a bit less outrage, for some reason, on the Democratic side of the aisle.

And yesterday, the President moved to waive the NDAA requirements that Senate Democrats themselves had supported in order to proceed with this misguided retreat.

The White House has yet to address the obvious risks of our departure: that the Taliban will regain control, al-Qaida will return to strength, and the people of Afghanistan—particularly, women and girls—will suffer.

We don't have to wait long for these fears to prove prescient. The Taliban has wasted no time in ramping up its campaign to drag more of the country back under its oppressive medieval rule—more killing of soldiers, journalists, and activists; more oppression of women; and more ambitious operational goals.

As one Taliban commander put it, “when we arrive in Kabul, we will arrive as conquerors.” Well, they are inching closer every day while we withdraw, and this is all happening, as I just indicated, before our retreat is even complete.

Experts are still unsure just how quickly the Taliban's resurgence will accelerate as we depart. That is bad news for our partners in Kabul. It is bad news for the Afghan military,

which is losing its edge without coalition support on the ground. And it is especially bad news for Afghanistan's women and girls. I know many of my colleagues share my concern for our partners in Afghanistan and for the many Afghan women who have reclaimed so much of their freedom since 2001. So make no mistake, their future will be imperiled under Taliban rule.

Rhetorical support for Senate resolutions and hollow promises of assistance from afar might ease our consciences somewhat, but they cannot take the place of the coalition forces in supporting our partners and vulnerable populations in Afghanistan. That won't prevent the resurgence of al-Qaida, with whom a recent United Nations report found Taliban militants “show no indication of breaking ties.”

So where is the plan? Where is the plan to deal with these challenges as we abandon our partners and leave them to the Taliban?

How does the administration intend to combat terror or support Afghan forces if we are hundreds of miles away? How does it intend to counter the negative influence of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, and others who might see our departure as massive opportunity? Have we learned nothing from Russia's intervention in Syria?

So later this week, President Biden will meet in person with leaders of our NATO allies, many of whom have expressed concerns about the risks of a precipitous withdrawal from Afghanistan. But, of course, as we withdraw, they will, as well, because without us there won't be a NATO presence in Afghanistan.

So for the sake of American security and the strength of our partnerships, it is time for the President to finally offer some clear answers to advance our shared interest in combating terrorists who still mean us harm and to restore faith in our resolve to finish things that we start.

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. THUNE. 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.

CYBERSECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last week, we learned that global meat processing company JBS, one of the four meatpacking companies responsible for more than 80 percent of beef processing operations, had suffered a ransomware attack. The attack temporarily shuttered the company's U.S. beef plants, threatening the beef supply and leaving ranchers wondering once again whether they would be able to sell their cattle.

The JBS attack highlights two important issues. The first is cyber security. The rise of ransomware attacks

on critical industries and infrastructure represents a serious threat.

Less than a month before the ransomware attack on meatpacking, ransomware criminals hacked the Colonial Pipeline, which supplies gasoline and jet fuel to the east coast. The Colonial attack caused fuel shortages and drove up gas prices, with many consumers facing gas station lines that hearkened back to the oil crisis of the 1970s.

In today's society, where almost everything we do has a cyber component, ransomware and other malicious cyber attacks carry the potential to seriously disrupt our way of life.

Cyber security needs to be one of our top priorities. Private companies need to invest in cyber security, to keep their systems and customer data secure, and the Federal Government has to invest in it as a matter of national security. We can't afford to let hostile individuals or hostile governments hack key government databases or functions.

I was proud to be a lead sponsor of the HACKED Act, which became law as part of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act. This legislation focuses on enhancing both public and private cyber security development. It bolsters science education and cyber security programs at multiple government Agencies, and enhances partnerships between universities and employers on cyber security workforce needs.

We need to continue to make cyber security training a priority. We also need to send a clear message to governments that harbor cyber attackers. It is obvious that Russia remains a haven for cyber criminals. Both the Colonial Pipeline and JBS attacks were the work of Russia-linked hackers, and we need to make it clear to Russia and other countries that we have no tolerance for the harboring of cyber criminals.

MEATPACKING INDUSTRY

The JBS attack also highlighted a second problem—the highly concentrated nature of the meatpacking industry. When one or more of a handful of companies controlling the meatpacking industry experiences a problem, whether that is a plant shutdown due to COVID transmission or a cyber attack, that creates a potentially serious problem for the entire U.S. meat supply.

We all remember seeing bare meat department shelves at times during the pandemic. Had meatpacking capacity been less concentrated, it is likely that we would not have seen such significant shortages.

This high level of concentration in the industry also creates a problem for livestock producers, who rely on meatpackers to buy and harvest their animals and get them to consumers.

If a meatpacker has to shut down a plant, that means that farmers or ranchers may lose out on getting their livestock to market.

The highly concentrated nature of the meatpacking industry also creates

the opportunity for market manipulation. In fact, serious concerns have been raised about market manipulation in the beef industry, owing to the substantial and ongoing gulf between meatpacker profits and rancher profits.

I recently sent a letter to the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee requesting that the committee hold an oversight hearing into potential anticompetitive behavior and antitrust violations of the meatpacking sector. This followed on my letter to the Attorney General, urging the Justice Department to disclose the results of its investigation into the meatpacking industry, and my request to the Senate Agriculture Committee to hold a hearing examining the challenges livestock producers have been facing.

I will continue to work to make sure any anticompetitive behavior in the beef-packing industry is addressed.

I will continue to support efforts to increase competition in the meatpacking industry, like my legislation to support small meatpackers, the Strengthening Local Processing Act. I introduced this legislation in February, along with Senator MERKLEY, to help strengthen and diversify national meat processing capacity by providing new resources for smaller, more local meat processing operations.

As I said, more than 80 percent of the beef-packing industry in this country is controlled by just four companies.

Encouraging more companies to get into this marketplace and encouraging small meatpackers to expand will dilute the power of these four companies and create more competition for ranchers' cattle, which will lead to higher prices for ranchers—higher prices for ranchers—when they bring their cattle to the market.

Plus, spreading out and expanding our Nation's meat processing capacity will make our Nation's meat supply less vulnerable to interruptions in situations like the pandemic or other natural disasters or the JBS ransomware attack.

South Dakota cattle producers work hard every day to deliver top-quality beef to our Nation and to the world. I am proud to represent them here in the Senate, and I will continue to fight to enhance competition in the meatpacking industry so that ranchers and all livestock producers can receive a competitive price for their livestock.

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. CORNYN. 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.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, the right to vote is the most fundamental

and essential feature of our democracy. As Abraham Lincoln said, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people would not be possible if it weren't for citizens who cast their ballot at every available election.

From city councils, to school boards, to Presidents of the United States, the American people have a right and, I would argue, a duty to make their voices heard. In 2020, a record number of voters did just that. Nearly 160 million Americans cast their ballot, accounting for roughly two-thirds of all eligible voters. If you compare that to 2016, just 4 years earlier, 17 million more people voted in the last election. This included higher turnout across all racial and ethnic groups—African Americans, Caucasians, Hispanics, Asians. Each had a higher turnout this election.

When Congress originally passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965, the goal was to eliminate common discriminatory practices that were in place at that time. It was and it is a landmark piece of legislation. There is no question it has been an overwhelming success, and I think that is something we should celebrate as a nation.

In 2012, for the first time on record, turnout among Black voters was higher than for White voters. In 2020, both Asian and Hispanic voters turned out at the highest rate on record. We certainly have come a long way, as the preamble to the Constitution says, in our effort to form a more perfect Union, but we should not tire, nor falter, nor fail in our progress to make sure that everyone who has the right to vote has an opportunity to cast their ballot.

Before every election—and 2020 was no different—there is a widespread effort to register new voters and encourage more citizens to participate. In Texas, we set new records in registering and turning out voters. We turned out 11.3 million voters, 66 percent of those registered. In the years to come, I hope we will set new records and get more voters to the polls. I think that goal should be shared by every American.

But in addition to this work, we have a responsibility to protect the integrity of the ballot. This became a focus in particular after the 2016 election when we actually saw Russia try to interfere with the Presidential election that year.

In response, Congress provided hundreds of millions of dollars to shore up State election security measures and to help local officials safeguard future elections. Our intelligence community and particularly the National Security Agency and Cyber Command made sure that there were no cyber attacks or minimized the impact of potential cyber attacks on election voting systems, including voter registries and the like. The postmortem reviews were that they were pretty successful in deterring those sorts of attacks that occurred in 2016.