

Do my colleagues forget? Remember what Donald Trump did? Was he interested in a free, open, fair election? Donald Trump tried to pressure local officials to overturn a democratic election in America. It was a stress test on our democracy unlike any in recent history, but our institutions held. So now what do Republicans want to do? Change the results. Change the election officials.

Again, Trump tried to pressure local officials to overturn democratic elections in a huge stress test on our democracy. Our institutions held. Local officials certified election results. The courts rejected spurious claims of fraud. Vice President Pence, no less, opened the proper envelopes. The House and Senate came together to count the results of the electoral college in the immediate aftermath of an armed insurrection.

Now—now—because they couldn't win the election and our institutions, our democratic—small “d,” democratic—institutions held, they want to change who is running the elections to be partisan and biased. Republican State legislatures are actively removing many of the barriers that prevented Donald Trump from subverting our elections. Shame. Shame. Shame.

I lay all this information at the feet of my Republican colleagues: a sweeping effort to disenfranchise millions of voters, mostly Black and Brown students, the working poor; an attack on the checks that held our democracy together in the face of Donald Trump's assaults. Many of us wondered: Will these institutions hold? Would Trump-appointed judges tell the Trump lawyers that they were full of bunk and there wasn't fraud? They did. It was a glorious moment for our democracy, and the Republican majority here in the Senate wants to undo it and doesn't even want to debate it.

We can argue what should be done to protect voting rights and safeguard our democracy, but don't you think we should be able to debate the issue? The vote tomorrow is on, to my people watching. It is called a motion to proceed. It is how we get bills on the floor of the Senate. It needs 60 votes to be able to be debated. Will our Republicans let us debate it? That is the only question on the table for the U.S. Senate tomorrow, and we are about to find out how my Republican colleagues will answer that question.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, later this week, President Biden will meet with leaders of the Afghanistan civilian democratic government. It doesn't take an administrative leak to know what will be on the agenda.

President Ghani and Chairman Abdullah Abdullah will arrive in Washington as a grave situation in their country rapidly deteriorates.

The strategic and moral consequences of President Biden's decision to abandon Afghanistan are already coming painfully into focus. Without air cover and with reduced support from the U.S.-led coalition, our Afghan partners are struggling to hold back the Taliban onslaught.

In just the 2 months since the President's announcement, extremist militants have retaken control of at least 30—30—of Afghanistan's administrative districts. Reports from the ground indicate that their heavy-handed, medieval rule is already creating new nightmares, especially for Afghan women and girls. And just last week, more than 20 of the elite, U.S.-trained special forces, who represent the country's best hope of resistance, were literally slaughtered in a Taliban raid. So it is getting harder and harder to believe that “over-the-horizon” support will be enough to help our Afghan partners sustain the fight against these terrorist threats. It is already clear it would intensify challenges to our own national security.

This spring, the intelligence community warned that the Taliban was “likely to make gains on the battlefield.” As the Director of the CIA put it, “ability to collect and act on threats will diminish.” Now senior defense officials are portraying follow-on threats like the resurgence of al-Qaida as not a matter of if but when.

Last week, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs acknowledged that al-Qaida still seeks to directly threaten the United States and that it could have the necessary capabilities to do so in 2 years—or even less in the case of a Taliban victory in Kabul.

They want to know how we plan to support their defensive campaign without the air support that literally saves soldiers' lives. They want to know how we plan to contribute to urgent counterterrorism missions without a robust system for collecting intelligence on the ground. And if President Biden is unwilling to reverse course, they want to know who will help protect their fellow citizens forced to flee by the Taliban's conquest.

The State Department is not prepared to efficiently process visa claims from the many Afghans who have worked closely with our personnel, let alone the massive flows of refugees already on the move. Where are the friends of America to turn? Where will they turn?

It is time for President Biden to acknowledge the consequences of his decision: that a refugee crisis in Afghanistan will mean senseless suffering; that the collapse of the Afghan state will mean a security and economic crisis across the region, a crisis America and its partners will simply be unable to ignore; that the fallout of our retreat

will draw attention and resources away from even greater strategic threats from Russia and China; and that every bit of it would have been avoidable, totally avoidable.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, Madam President, on another matter, as I have noted before, Senate Democrats entered June with an agenda that was designed to fail. Our Democratic leader planned votes on a host of the left's most radical priorities. None of it was ever intended to clear the Senate's appropriately high bar for advancing legislation. Instead, the failure of their partisan agenda was meant to show somehow—somehow—that the Senate itself was failing.

For months, our colleagues built anticipation for the failure. They even started previewing the latest argument they have made when it happened. Apparently, the same Senate rule a Democratic minority had used with abandon was now somehow a racist relic to be abandoned by a Democratic majority.

In the end, one particular radical proposal took priority. S. 1 is the same bad bill it has been since the House introduced its version back in 2019 with the same nakedly partisan motives. But ever since Democrats got the election outcome they wanted last fall, we have watched our colleagues actually update the rationale for their latest partisan power grab: States must be stopped from exercising control over their own election laws.

The arguments here have one big thing in common with the ones our colleagues have deployed against the filibuster: debunked claims of racism.

Remember, the last Presidential election saw the highest voter turnout in decades, even amidst a once-in-a-century pandemic, and African-American turnout was twice as high in Mississippi as it was in Massachusetts. But when Georgia passed targeted updates to its election laws based on lessons learned during the pandemic-era elections, Democrats trashed the bill as a “redux of Jim Crow.” They misrepresented its contents so wildly that even left-leaning “fact-checks” repeatedly debunked these claims. But by then, the train of disinformation had left the station. Pretty soon, any State that dared to deviate from unique, pandemic-era procedures faced summary judgment in the court of liberal outrage. It hasn't seemed to matter that the facts tell a different story.

The bill that led Texas Democrats to exercise the rights of a legislative minority last month requires more counties to adhere to new minimum hours for early voting. The Oklahoma bill that expanded early voting for general elections was passed by a Republican legislature and signed by a Republican Governor. In my State of Kentucky, the expansion of both online registration and early voting this spring passed

on a bipartisan basis, and a Democratic Governor signed it.

Democrats have continued to insist that S. 1 is a response to these State laws, but we know it actually predates them. And we are starting to see that our colleagues' latest rationale for S. 1 can be flexible when needed. Prominent Democrats have railed against voter ID requirements for years, but now that voter ID is among the sticking points keeping the Democratic caucus from uniting behind S. 1, some Democrats have started indicating, well, they have had a change of heart. Now, I would commend them for coming around to commonsense positions on that issue that 80 percent of Americans already support. But one supposed compromise, among some Democrats, bears more than a passing resemblance to the partisan power grab their party has touted for years. It even introduces its own disastrous new liabilities, like a proposal to automate redistricting that is certainly constitutionally dubious.

At the end of the day, Madam President, which concocted crisis Democrats choose as justification for their top legislative priority actually doesn't make much difference. They have made abundantly clear that the real driving force behind S. 1 is a desire to rig the rules of American elections permanently—permanently—in the Democrats' favor. That is why the Senate will give this disastrous proposal no quarter.

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 bill clerk read the nomination of Christopher Charles Fonzzone, of Pennsylvania, to be General Counsel of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

AUTHORIZATION FOR USE OF MILITARY FORCE

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it was October of 2002. I remember the day when in the Senate we decided to vote on the question as to whether or not we would authorize President Bush to use military force in Afghanistan. We considered the issue of Iraq before. Twenty-three of us had voted against giving that authority to President Bush.

When it came to Afghanistan, the argument was different. The argument was that those responsible for 9/11, for

killing 3,000 innocent Americans, were hiding out in Afghanistan, and if we didn't ferret them out of their hiding place and hold them accountable, what kind of nation would we be? I bought that argument. Virtually every Member of Congress agreed, with one exception—Congresswoman BARBARA LEE of California. But we voted to use military force in Afghanistan under extraordinary circumstances in 2002.

Now, I listened to the Republican leader come to the floor and accuse President Biden of abandoning Afghanistan, retreating from Afghanistan. And he leaves out some salient facts. The negotiation with the Taliban, which was initiated by President Trump, was a negotiation to determine who would be in power, what areas they would hold, and when the United States would leave. It was President Trump who initiated that negotiation, not President Biden. President Biden, when he took office, followed through with it. I applauded him for doing so.

I realize—and I think everyone does—that the situation in Afghanistan is perilous, but I think that we ought to acknowledge the obvious. After the longest war in the history of the United States, after losing over a thousand American lives and tens of thousands wounded, after spending trillions of dollars, we were not winning in Afghanistan. We didn't have a winning hand or a winning strategy. The Taliban was still a viable political force, and the Afghan security forces many times were overwhelmed by that Taliban force.

I wonder why the Republican leader from Kentucky doesn't do the obvious. He has the authority, under the rules of the Senate, to introduce a measure authorizing the use of military force in Afghanistan. If he believes we should stay or send more troops there, that is his right. He can offer that on the floor of the Senate, instead of lamenting what has happened there. He has the authority. If he thinks we have abandoned the Afghan people and should go back into that country, why doesn't he offer an authorization for use of military force?

I think we know the answer. There is little or no support on his side of the aisle, nor on this side of the aisle, to make the longest war in American history even longer. Yes, we should be a viable force to try to make certain the Afghan people have a fighting chance. But after almost 20 years at it, I think we have shown that our strategy was not the winning strategy.

CORONAVIRUS

Madam President, on a different subject, as our Nation continues to emerge from COVID-19 restrictions, vaccinated Americans were able to gather safely this past weekend for two happy events: Father's Day and the first Juneteenth Federal holiday. These celebrations came at the end of a week that brought welcome news to America.

After 11 years of Republicans fighting the Affordable Care Act, the Supreme

Court finally said: Enough. Millions of Americans have health insurance at a time when they desperately need it, in the midst of a pandemic, and your theories on Constitution and law are not adequate to end the Affordable Care Act. Thank goodness for that 7-2 ruling.

The administration, of course, was heartened by that and by the knowledge that we are fast approaching the point where 70 percent of the adults in America are going to be vaccinated.

Remember when President Biden took office 6 months ago? Yes, we had the vaccines, but we hadn't produced them in quantity, and we didn't have a plan for vaccinating America. Thank goodness, now the United States is leading the world in the effort to vaccinate its population. I thank President Biden for that and the resources that we provided to him.

We still have a challenge. We still have a threat. The Delta variant is much more easily spread than the COVID strain that shut down the Nation last year. It has now been identified in 41 States. For those who are holding back and not seeking a vaccination, they are in greater danger than they were a year ago if that infection comes near them. I hope my Republican colleagues will join the Democrats in urging Americans to be vaccinated as quickly as possible.

WAR ON DRUGS

On a different topic, Madam President, last week marked the 50-year anniversary of President Nixon's declaration of a War on Drugs. Today, America imprisons a greater share of its population than any nation on Earth. Drugs are cheaper and more easily available than ever, and substance abuse is destroying more American families than ever. The greatest harm has fallen on our most vulnerable citizens, particularly low-income Americans and communities of color.

During the first four decades of the Nixon War on Drugs, America's Federal prison population grew by 700 percent, and the cost of operating Federal prisons exploded by 1,100 percent. Today, nearly half the people in Federal prisons are locked up due to drug-related charges. We are learning the hard way that we can't jail our way out of a public health crisis.

In recent years, the Senate has come together on a significant bipartisan basis to correct some of the gravest mistakes on the War on Drugs. I am grateful to my friend, the ranking Republican member on the Judiciary Committee, Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, for his leadership in this effort. We forged a bipartisan partnership that ended up sending the First Step Act, a reform effort, to President Bush to sign into law—pardon me—sent to President Trump to sign into law.

Tomorrow, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a hearing on another crucial piece of reform: Eliminating the disparate treatment of