

I would suggest: Pick another target. Find some other group to make your budget point of order. Please don't take this out on these people who are in the most desperate situations in their life. This is not the time and place to raise this budget debate. I seriously hope that you will think about them for a moment.

I object to your modification.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection to the original request?

Mr. TOOMEY. Reserving the right to object, this is an amazing argument that the Senator from Illinois is making. He is saying: Don't worry. He would never do what the Senator from Pennsylvania is suggesting might happen and which, by the way, always used to happen, and, which, by the way, the President is asking us to do. We would never do it. Oh, but I will object to a requirement that the money actually go where we say it is going to go.

I think that tells us all we need to know. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2084

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, it has been a trying year for our Nation. Thankfully, the vaccine has brought so much hope and a semblance of normalcy back to the lives of many Americans.

As families and businesses in Florida and across the United States continue to work hard to recover from the devastation of COVID-19, travel is critical to get our economy fully reopened.

From the beginning of the pandemic, I encouraged everyone to wear a mask as we learned more about this virus, but now the science is clear that broad mask mandates aren't necessary. Unfortunately, the CDC has decided to buck the science when it comes to travel and is still requiring face masks on public transportation.

We have all heard the stories of how this mandate impacts families: a mother and her six children traumatized by being kicked off a flight after her 2-year-old daughter refused to wear a mask; a New Jersey couple forced to deplane because their 2-year-old wouldn't wear a mask; a Colorado mother and their family booted off a flight over fears their 3-year-old son, who has a disability, wouldn't wear a mask; an Orthodox Jewish family kicked off a flight because their 15-month-old baby was not wearing a mask.

You can't make this stuff up. It has made traveling with children nearly impossible. After a year of hardships and being apart from loved ones, these families were denied the ability to reconnect. It is awful and unnecessary. And I hear stories all the time about parents with young children deciding, I am not getting on an airplane because I know I will get kicked off or I might get kicked off.

And to make guidelines even more confusing, you are allowed to remove

your mask to eat and drink. So why is it OK and totally safe to not have a mask while you eat a snack but dangerous to be unmasked any other time?

The CDC itself has been clear that mask mandates aren't needed. You don't have to wear a mask in a restaurant. You don't have to wear a mask in a hotel. You don't have to wear a mask at a school. You don't have to wear a mask in a stadium. So why is the CDC singling out airlines and public transportation? It doesn't make any sense.

This isn't a political argument. In fact, during our Commerce Committee markup of the surface transportation measure last week, both Democrats and Republicans expressed frustration at the continuation of the mask mandate. Republican and Democratic Governors and mayors across the country have followed the science and lifted mask mandates.

Just like the Federal Government should not be in the business of requiring Americans to turn over their vaccination records, the Federal Government should not be mandating citizens wear masks on public transportation.

That is why I introduced the Stop Mandating Additional Requirements for Travel, or SMART Act, which would revoke the Federal requirement for Americans to wear masks on public transportation. Americans should be free to make choices they feel are in the best interest of their own health and the health of their loved ones.

If someone wants to wear a mask, they are absolutely free to do so, but the government has no right to tell them what to do. If an airline or other private company decides it wants to implement a mask policy, so be it. This does not prohibit them from doing so.

I have been clear. Private companies should be able to make decisions that they feel are appropriate for their employees and their customers. And their customer gets to make a decision.

This bill is pure common sense, and I am glad to be joined today by my colleague from Utah, Senator LEE, and he will be speaking after I ask for the consent.

The science just doesn't support keeping the mask mandate in place. We have to listen to the science and work together to move America forward. I know Americans will do the right thing to stay safe, and I hope my colleagues join me in passing this important bill.

Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on HELP be discharged from further consideration of S. 2084 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I ask unanimous consent that the bill 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?

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, right now,

experts at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are continuing to update their mask requirements based on the latest developments, including requirements related to travel. They need us to be reinforcing their science-based work to keep people safe, not overruling it.

We cannot pretend this pandemic is over. This virus is still spreading; it is still mutating; it is still costing lives; and it is still leaving survivors with long-haul symptoms. And the new Delta variant is more contagious, more likely to send people to the hospital, and already in our country.

We have made great progress on vaccinations, but there are still people who are not vaccinated, as well as people who cannot yet get vaccinated. We know masks remain a simple, effective way to protect everyone, especially in small crowded spaces—in an airplane, on a bus, or a train.

Getting rid of mask requirements for travel before the experts tell us it is safe to do so is not going to get people to their destinations any faster, and it is not going to end this pandemic any faster. Instead, it will draw things out. It will cost time, and it will cost lives. To get everyone safely through this pandemic, we need to listen to the experts and let them do their jobs; therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I echo the remarks presented by my friend and colleague, the junior Senator from Florida. I agree wholeheartedly with his analysis. I think it is unfortunate that we missed this opportunity to enact meaningful change today, change that is backed up by science.

It was in January of this year that the Centers for Disease Control ordered the mandatory use of masks on planes, trains, buses, and other modes of public transit of every kind everywhere across this country. If Americans failed to comply with this mandate, they risked being fined or even criminally prosecuted.

Six months later, the coronavirus continues with the CDC refusing to recognize its own research that the mandate is no longer defensible. It is now June. The vaccine has been made available for months, COVID cases are plummeting, and the country is anxious to return to the way things once were. The CDC has even said that vaccinated Americans don't have to wear masks and can get their lives back to normal.

More than 45 percent of Americans are now fully vaccinated. States are lifting their restrictions, and in restaurants, stores, and workplaces across the country, it is no longer required, mercifully, to wear a mask. If Americans still want to wear one, they can make that decision for themselves. They are free to do so. But the CDC's requirement that vaccinated individuals—even vaccinated individuals—

must wear masks on all forms of public transit now blatantly contradicts the Agency's own policies and the Agency's own scientific research. It needlessly promotes fear and plays politics with the lives of the American people, not to mention it has imposed absurd expectations and serious consequences on children and families, especially families with children trying to travel.

You see, after the January mandate, the CDC issued a corresponding mandate that exempted only children over the age of 2, in keeping with their original mask-wearing guidance, guidance that is among the most stringent in the world and, I would add, the most unrealistic in the world, when you consider that they require it up to and including children as young as 2 years old.

So what have been some of the results of this guidance? Parents have been kicked off and banned from flights if their small children refuse to wear a mask. For parents of kids with disabilities and many parents of especially small children, compliance has been nearly impossible.

We already know that children, especially young children, are unlikely to contribute to the spread of the virus. What we do not know, however, is what scientific studies, if any at all, the CDC happens to be relying on in reaching this guidance—in reaching the conclusions underlying this guidance.

In fact, several of my colleagues and I sent a letter to the Agency with this very question more than 2 months ago, on April 22, 2021. And now, more than 2 months later, we have yet to receive an answer. It is a very simple question, and we have yet to receive any shred, any semblance, any scintilla of an answer. I find that unacceptable.

If the CDC actually believes its own research, then it should act like it. And if it believes in the vaccines, the very vaccines on which we have spent billions of taxpayer dollars, then it should act consistently and instill confidence in the American people, rather than fear.

And with the vaccine now free and widely available, Americans should be able to weigh the cost of the options before them and choose for themselves whether to receive the vaccine, whether to wear a mask, or whether to take their own precautions free of any mandates imposed by their government.

But if the Federal Government is going to have a say in whether or not there should be a mandate, it should be up to Congress, the sole branch of the Federal Government empowered to enact law and, not coincidentally, the branch elected by and held most accountable to the people at most regular intervals. It should be up to this branch of government, the legislative branch, to enact such a mandate.

To the extent that the CDC issued this mandate, it did so using authority delegated to it from Congress. We, in Congress, did not pass the mask mandate, and we do not have to defer to those bureaucrats who did.

The science—the science shows that wearing masks should not be Federal law, and we should act accordingly. We should, moreover, give Americans some reason to want to be vaccinated. When there is light at the end of the tunnel and when they can see there is some tangible, immediate benefit to them getting vaccinated, they are more likely to do it. If they can safely enter a place of mass transit without a mask, if they choose to do so, many more people will choose to get vaccinated if we give them that benefit or if we at least allow the operators of those modes of transportation to allow people to do that.

We can assert our rightful authority and promote sound science and common sense by supporting the bill introduced by my friend and colleague, Senator SCOTT of Florida. We need this to pass. The American people have suffered through a very, very long COVID winter. It is time for them to be able to make their own choices. That is what we do best as Americans because we believe in freedom.

We also believe that whenever the coercive power of government, especially the coercive power of the Federal Government is exercised, it must do so with the authority of Congress. We should never tacitly acquiesce to the authority of overlords within a bureaucratic Agency who are elected by no one and ultimately accountable only to themselves.

We are in charge here. We make the law. We shouldn't blindly defer to anyone, certainly not the CDC when the CDC ignores its own science.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I thank my colleague from Utah for his comments. I want to thank his continued commitment always to make sure that we, Congress, handles everything we can. We don't defer constantly to the executive branch in making decisions that we should be making.

This is a simple example of why we should be making this decision. This is following the science, and I am actually shocked that my colleague from the State of Washington does not want to follow the science.

I don't understand why my colleague from the State of Washington wants government to be dictating things. Why do we want to dictate to Americans how to lead their lives? Why does she think that the government—why has the government lifted mandates in States all across the country but not—and why is the CDC fine with every place but public transportation? It just doesn't make any sense.

Americans will do the right thing. It is not our job to dictate, to tell them how to lead their lives. If someone wants to wear a mask, so be it. They should do it, but the government has no right to tell them that they have to wear a mask. If an airline or another private company decides it wants to implement a mask policy, have at it.

We shouldn't prohibit them from wanting to do that, but we should not be dictating this.

So I am disappointed that my colleague from the State of Washington didn't go along, but I think it is important for us to always make sure we are doing the right thing for the American public and, right now, the right thing is eliminate the mask mandate on public transportation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today in support of two critical nominations: Jen Easterly's nomination to be the Director of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency—commonly referred to as CISA—within the Department of Homeland Security, as well as Robin Carnahan to be the Administrator of the General Services Administration, or GSA.

Our country is under attack. Nation-state actors and criminal organizations are relentlessly targeting our government, critical infrastructure, and key industries to infiltrate networks, steal information, conduct espionage, and demand ransom payments.

These cyber attacks pose a serious threat to our national security. As we saw from the SolarWinds hack, as well as the Colonial Pipeline and JBS ransomware attacks, cyber criminals are constantly looking to exploit cyber security vulnerabilities and find the weakest link. We must be vigilant about preventing these attacks, and we need a strong, coordinated approach from across the Federal Government to better secure America's networks. That means the Senate needs to confirm qualified cyber security nominees so that they can get to work immediately.

CISA is the lead domestic Agency for cyber security in the Federal Government. It is responsible for ensuring that Federal Departments and Agencies—our private sector critical infrastructure partners—and the American people have the resources to detect, to withstand, and to respond to cyber attacks. GSA provides a wide range of support to Agencies across the government. One of GSA's key functions is to provide funding and expertise to help Agencies both modernize and secure their IT systems and their networks. We need Senate-confirmed leadership at the top of these critical Agencies, and we need it today.

Ms. Easterly has served for over three decades in the Federal Government and the private sector.

Since 2017, Ms. Easterly has led the operations center for Morgan Stanley's cyber defense strategy. She was also a critical member of the Cyber Solarium Commission, which has made 80 recommendations for cyber deterrence, 25 of which have already become law.