

The dangers facing the Afghan people—especially, especially women and girls—are heartbreaking. The humanitarian crisis may well be historic. But this is also an awful, bungled mess from the perspective of our own national security. The President's own CIA Director told Senators this decision would be certain to inhibit our ability to collect intelligence. Gen. Frank McKenzie of Central Command confirmed this week, this very week, that intelligence collection was already suffering.

The President's top advisers understand very well that the Taliban is capable of retaking control of Afghanistan in just a matter of months. This would allow al-Qaida to reconstitute. So analysts are debating not if, not whether, but when al-Qaida will again threaten the United States from Afghanistan.

Just wait until we see Russia and China rushing into the void, exploiting our retreat to expand their power and influence in Central Asia. Just wait until the botched retreat and lingering threats end up requiring a large, ongoing presence of our military and surveillance forces in the region rather than freeing up resources for the Indo-Pacific. Just wait until the Biden administration ends up consumed with this humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan and its destabilizing effects rather than focusing on building coalitions to counter Chinese or Russian aggression.

Yet, amid all this, President Biden isn't reconsidering. Instead, he is flooring it. The administration actually sped up the withdrawal so it can accomplish it even before the darkly ironic deadline of September 11.

So I have forcefully opposed efforts by Presidents of both parties to cut and run from our work in Syria or Afghanistan. I have warned of the huge strategic price America would pay if this administration pretends that terrorists will play nicely with their political timeline. As one recent headline put it, "We might be done with jihadis but they are not done with us."

President Biden and his team are desperate to duck hard questions about Afghanistan, but the American people deserve answers. They deserve to understand the risks of this trajectory and how the Commander in Chief plans to keep us safe against a terrorist enemy that his own senior advisers admit will be allowed to regroup thanks to the President's actions.

I hope that, even in this Democratically controlled Congress, our national security committees will uphold their obligation to oversee this unfolding debacle and its implications. Ending our presence in Afghanistan will not end the terrorist war against us. Sadly, the opposite is likely to be true. This self-inflicted wound could very well make the struggle even more difficult and even more dangerous.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now on a totally different matter, Senators have just spent 2 weeks traveling our home States and hearing what is on the minds of working families. I got to spend time with all kinds of hard-working Kentuckians across the Bluegrass.

There is no question we are in better shape than we were a year ago. Thanks to the genius of science, the success of Operation Warp Speed, and the bipartisan rescue packages the Republican-led Senate passed in 2020, the year 2021 was primed and set up for a historic American comeback well before the new Democratic Congress or the new Democratic administration was even sworn in.

But Democrats still wanted to rush ahead with the huge borrowing and spending sprees they had promised their far left. Top economists, including famous Democrats, warned our colleagues to think again. Even liberal experts tried to warn our colleagues that the socialist ideas they had drawn up in 2020 were not suited to what Americans needed in 2021. Overspending and overborrowing would unleash inflation, slow rehiring, and hurt small businesses.

All that was predicted, but Democrats rushed ahead. They rammed through what the White House bragged was the most leftwing legislation in our Nation's history, and now Democrats want to follow up with an even more absurd summer sequel.

Well, let me tell you, I just spent 2 weeks hearing from my fellow Kentuckians, and they are already paying a heavy price. Manufacturers are still absolutely hammered by supply chain shocks. Employers large and small say Democrats' special bonus for workers to stay unemployed is badly hampering their ability to fully reopen and to serve their customers. Most of our surrounding States have already put a stop to this awful idea, but Kentucky's Governor, regretfully, hasn't.

It isn't just for-profit businesses, either, that are having trouble getting people back to work. I heard from one residential treatment center for pregnant women and new moms grappling with substance abuse. They said that because of the generous Federal bonus for staying home, they have had trouble finding enough support staff to even reopen one of their facilities post-COVID. About 80 percent of the people who schedule an interview don't even show up.

These backward bonuses have also invited heaps—heaps—of fraud. In California, for example, a significant share of the State's COVID unemployment benefits were paid out fraudulently, billions and billions of dollars to people who shouldn't have gotten them at all. And now—get this—Democrats want to give the California labor secretary who was in charge of that nightmare a promotion. In fact, we are scheduled to vote on her confirmation today to a leading position at the Department of

Labor. You really can't make this stuff up.

And then there is inflation. Just this morning, we learned that runaway inflation has continued to hit working families and hit them hard. Consumer prices spiked in June considerably more than had been forecast. Inflation is up 5.4 percent year over year—the fastest jump in 13 years. Stunningly, it is up 0.9 percent just month over month. Families are feeling it everywhere, from the supermarket to the gas pumps, to housing, to the used car lot, and beyond—all thanks in part to the Democrats' half-baked spending spree from the springtime. Now they want an even more absurd, even more damaging summer sequel.

What Democrats say they want to force through this summer through reconciliation would make our current inflationary mess look like small potatoes. Nobody seriously thinks our country needs another gigantic overdose of overborrowing, overspending, and overtaxing.

This isn't what the American people voted for, either. Our distinguished colleague, the junior Senator from Vermont, the chair of the Budget Committee, has been very transparent about his socialist ideology for decades, very upfront about it, but the country didn't elect a 50–50 Senate and a President who claimed to be a moderate so that Chairman SANDERS could turn America into a socialist country.

Working Americans know that is not what they voted for. This summer they will see who wants to borrow and spend trillions more dollars for no reason and who would rather help them get their jobs back, their stable prices back, their small businesses back, and their lives back.

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 senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Uzra Zeya, of Virginia, to be an Under Secretary of State (Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip is recognized.

CHINA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last night I had an interesting dinner. Senator CHRIS COONS of Delaware and I joined two Republican Senators, and we met for dinner with eight Ambassadors from Central and South America. It was a rare occurrence which we

hadn't seen in the last year and a half, the kind of dialogue and communication which I think is an important part of my job and an important part of understanding the world today.

They had one consistent message. Despite the fact that they felt a closeness to the United States that had been built up over decades of generations, there was a new factor in Central and South America which each one of them repeated as significant in the future of that region. The new factor is the arrival of China.

In each one of these countries, large and small, China has become a player, a force. They have invested their resources in developing an economic relationship with these countries, have provided them with COVID-19 vaccines when others would not, and were becoming larger and larger factors in the future of the economies of these countries.

Senator COONS said at one point, and I certainly would agree with him: We have to take this seriously in the United States. We can't assume that long-term relationships and friendships will see us through. We need to be actively engaged in strengthening and creating alliances with these countries in our hemisphere.

He added—and I am glad he did—the United States has chosen, over recent history, to literally spend trillions of dollars on military efforts and those overseas commitments, which is money China wasn't spending for the same purpose. China was spending trillions of dollars to develop economic relationships, to loan money for infrastructure projects in developing countries.

The United States was spending its money in other places, which takes me directly to the statement that was made earlier by the Republican Senate leader, Senator MCCONNELL, about Afghanistan. You see, I was here on the floor of the Senate when we voted to invade Afghanistan, and I voted for it. We were told that al-Qaida was waiting there in hiding for the next opportunity to strike America and that if we didn't do our part to go after Osama bin Laden, there would be more American innocent victims. Overwhelmingly, on a bipartisan vote, a unanimous bipartisan vote, in the Senate Chamber, we voted to invade Afghanistan, and I was one of those votes.

Let me quickly add that I was one of 23 who voted against the invasion of Iraq. I didn't think the case had been made by the Bush administration and still don't.

But going into Afghanistan was, with the exception of one Member of the House, a unanimous bipartisan verdict at that moment in American history. As we look back on it now, I don't think a single person who voted for the invasion of Afghanistan would have ever guessed that we were voting for the longest war in the history of the United States. Yes, that is what it turned out to be—over 20 years in the war in Afghanistan.

Well, decisions have been made to change that, and they were not made by President Biden alone. They were first made by President Trump. If you will remember correctly, he was negotiating with the Taliban for an exit strategy, a timetable, to leave Afghanistan, and they were reaching agreement on that fact. The Senator from Kentucky didn't dwell on that fact, but it is an important one. The decision had been made by the Republican administration to leave. Biden inherited it and accepted it, and he has been going forward with that.

Keep in mind, we are not leaving without an effort. It is a supreme effort for more than 2,000 Americans who lost their lives in that effort in Afghanistan and more than \$1 trillion—much more than \$1 trillion—being spent in dedication to that effort over the years. So after all that effort, it was clear this long-term war was going to be longer still, and the Senator from Kentucky came to the floor today with the plea that we should have continued that war in Afghanistan—to what end and on what timetable, I have no idea.

But it is interesting when he mentions the fact that there were Afghan citizens helping the United States who were not being treated properly. You see, Senator LEAHY, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, has an emergency security supplemental bill, which he is trying to move quickly. It has already passed the House. It pays for the expenses of January 6 and the mob that invaded the Capitol after being inspired by President Trump. But it does more than that. It provides resources for those Afghans who did help us in that war to protect them.

I would vote for that in a second, but that emergency supplemental has been bogged down by the Republican side of the aisle. And then the Republican leader comes and says we are not doing enough for the refugees. I commend to him to read the Leahy supplemental appropriations. Resources are there for those same refugees. And I support that, he should support that and should instruct the Republican leader on the Appropriations Committee to join in the effort.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, the second issue the Republican leader raised this morning is worthy of note. When we passed emergency supplemental bills in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic crisis, and the Trump administration was in charge, they were bipartisan in nature. I was happy to support them. We were facing an American national public health crisis. Our economy was suffering gravely, families and workers the same.

Democrats joined with Republicans during the Trump years to provide resources to businesses and individuals across America to get through that terrible time. I am glad we did it. That is the kind of bipartisanship people expect.

So now what happens when President Biden arrives on the scene and comes up with an American Rescue Plan? Not one Republican Senator, not one Republican Congressman would vote for the American Rescue Plan. And Senator MCCONNELL this morning explained why: Because it was filled with what he called "socialist ideas."

Let's take a look at the Biden American Rescue Plan, just rife with socialism. Let me tell you what Senator MCCONNELL is including: billions of dollars for the administration of COVID-19 vaccines across the United States. No, President Trump didn't leave office with a plan for that to happen. President Biden had to create it in the American Rescue Plan. Is that socialism—to provide vaccines for millions of Americans to protect them against COVID-19? Apparently Senator MCCONNELL thinks it was.

And here is another one of his condemned socialist ideas: providing money to businesses to reopen and hire employees back. That is socialism? I don't think so. That is part of restoring a market economy that was badly damaged by COVID-19.

The list goes on—money that was given through the American Rescue Plan, without a single Republican vote, to help units of government that had lost so much revenue because of COVID-19 restore essential services.

President Biden has said that among those services is protection on the street, funding law enforcement—responsible law enforcement—to stop the killing. Well, I want to tell you that I am glad that he said that. It is not socialism in the city of Chicago, where on the Fourth of July weekend 104 people were shot—104 people were shot in Chicago, 19 killed, including 2 police officers who were shot, I might add. And the President said we should take the resources from the American Rescue Plan and dedicate them to restoring order in neighborhoods across America.

My city of Chicago is not an exception, sadly. It is a pattern that is showing up in cities across America, large and small. So these American rescue funds for that purpose, far from socialism, are really basic to what we expect in this country.

I know that the Senator from Kentucky returned to the Commonwealth over the break. He did an interesting dance, saying that he was glad that money was coming into Kentucky, but he didn't vote for it. We have heard that from Republicans across the Nation.

I wish they would have voted for it. Wouldn't it have been nice if Biden—President Biden—had enjoyed the same level of bipartisan support that we gave to President Trump on the Democratic side in the midst of this pandemic crisis? Maybe it is too much to ask from the minority leader, who has publicly announced that he is 100 percent opposed to the Biden agenda—not a very constructive approach.