

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.

CAPITOL FENCING AND JANUARY 6

Mr. President, I want to speak on a different topic at this point, Mr. President. As I walked into the Capitol, I took a look around and saw something that I have been waiting for. Families were walking across the parking lot right in front of the Capitol, enjoying themselves. Children were out in the grass running around. People were crowding together to snap selfies. That used to be so routine around here, but since January 6, it has not been the case.

Behind all of these families visiting their Nation's Capitol Building was this beautiful dome of the Capitol—majestic, unobstructed for the first time in 6 months.

Over the weekend, Capitol workers removed the remaining metal fencing and concrete barriers that have surrounded this building since the mob attack on January 6. My special thanks to those workers.

That security fencing stood as a reminder of what happened on January 6 when former President Donald Trump summoned and agitated a mob to Washington and then sent them on a mission to storm the heart of democracy.

Well, Trump is gone. But our democracy is still here. And the smiling faces outside the Capitol this week are a testament to the resilience that many Americans share today.

I want to thank President Biden for helping to unite this Nation. He brought us together by appealing to our shared values and our shared identity. His steady, nonconfrontational approach has been a breath of fresh air after the stifling storm of hateful, divisive tweets of the Trump years.

His leadership—President Biden's leadership—has allowed us to reopen this Capitol. So every American, and every visitor to the people's house, can experience this historic value.

But even as we celebrate the walls around our Capitol coming down, it is important to recognize that there are still many unanswered questions about January 6. Our Nation suffered a deadly, shameful, infamous—infamous—security breach on January 6. You would think that every Member of the Senate would be demanding to know what was behind it, what caused it, and to find a way to make certain it never happens again, especially since it left 140 Capitol Police officers and other law enforcement officers injured and 1 dead.

Sadly, most Republican lawmakers actively oppose investigating what happened on January 6. Even worse, some of them are whitewashing the events. Republican lawmakers in the House have called the insurrectionists patriots. Patriots? Have you seen the video? Those were patriots marching through these halls with Confederate flags, Trump flags?

One House Member, who helped barricade the House doors to protect himself from this mob, now calls the insurrectionists “a normal tourist visit.” Get out of here.

Appallingly, the former President, Donald Trump, last week threatened—now, listen to this—he is going to share sensitive, personal information about the officers who defended Members of Congress from an insurrectionist who attempted to storm the Speaker's Lobby.

These despicable efforts to rewrite the events of January 6, to somehow lionize the terrorists who participated in it and denigrate those who defended us, are nothing short of disgusting—and a second assault on our democracy.

It is a slap in the face of every officer who protected this building from a murderous mob. Our officers deserve answers for what happened that day, and they deserve to know who is responsible for it.

More than 535 people have already been arrested for their involvement in that insurrection—and many of them have ties to White supremacists and domestic terrorist organizations. How did these far-right, fringe groups plan their attack on our democracy? Who helped them? Who funded their effort? Who planted pipe bombs outside the headquarters of both political parties? What contacts, if any, did Members of Congress have with these insurrectionists in the days leading up to the attack?

We don't have a full accounting. Yet, last month, Republican Senators filibustered the creation of an independent, bipartisan commission to investigate the January 6 insurrection. Senator MCCONNELL pleaded with his caucus to block this commission.

Well, Congressional Democrats are determined to give the officers who defended this Capitol and the American people the truth about January 6. We are not going to tolerate whitewashing this attack for political purposes.

I strongly support Speaker PELOSI's decision to form a bipartisan select committee to investigate it, and I look forward to its findings. And as the House moves forward with its own investigation, we need to ask ourselves why the Republican Senate leader and all but six Republican Senators voted to prevent the Senate from doing its part to uncover the truth about this assault on our Capitol.

Not only does the Republican leader oppose efforts to investigate what happened on January 6, he is leading the effort against the funding needed to ensure it doesn't happen again. House and Senate Democrats have put forward good-faith proposals to provide emergency funding to deal with the ongoing security issues at the Capitol and give the Capitol Police and staff here the resources they need to do their job.

If this Senate fails to approve that supplemental funding package, the Capitol Police department may have to start furloughing dozens—maybe hundreds—of officers at the end of this month.

Let me be clear. No one—no one—has paid a heavier price for the insurrection than our Capitol Police Force.

They will carry the trauma of January 6 with them for the rest of their lives.

These officers work day and night to keep us safe and to secure the Capitol Complex for the American people who visit. The least we can do is to make sure they receive their paychecks.

Yesterday, Senator PATRICK LEAHY introduced an updated version of the supplemental package for security. It would fully pay our Capitol Police officers' salaries and provide additional funding to secure the Capitol Complex. It would also provide much-needed funding to deal with the impacts of the pandemic on the Capitol.

Over the last year, both the pandemic and insurrection put a huge financial strain on this institution. Keeping the Capitol and the people who work here in a safe situation is a new environment that will cost money.

So far, Republican colleagues have been unwilling to face the reality that we find ourselves in today and to spend the money needed to respond to the real threats we are facing. Their proposal falls short of the needs of the moment. Senator LEAHY's proposal will address the issues facing the Capitol Complex.

And don't we owe it to the men and women who protect us and our staff and our visitors to support their important work and pass this bill?

When a filibuster prevents the Senate from even investigating an attack on the Senate itself and another filibuster may be used to threaten paying our police officers who protect us, we have to ask a basic question: Who really benefits from the misuse of a filibuster? Does the current overuse and misuse of this filibuster benefit our democracy? Absolutely not.

The Republican leader has used the filibuster in a way never seen in the history of the Senate to prevent us from even starting debate on legislation that would make it easier for Americans to vote.

You know that, Mr. President, better than anyone because your State of Georgia is going through that debate at this very moment.

Does the filibuster in its current form actually benefit America? How could it? Last month, Senator MCCONNELL used the filibuster to block this body from taking up equal pay legislation, preventing employers from discriminating against women in the workplace. It is one of the many policies supported by a broad majority of American people of both political parties. Unfortunately, those ideas—as good as they are, as popular as they are, as needed as they are—are dead on arrival in the Senate thanks to Senator MCCONNELL and his filibuster.

So again, I ask: What benefits do we derive from grinding our government to a halt? It is a small club that benefits. You know who is in it? The wealthiest individuals and the richest corporations. The elites are the only people who benefit from our broken political system. It stops progress altogether.