

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.

The Framers of the Constitution never intended for one-half of one branch of government to be equipped with a kill switch that any Senator can push to avoid honest debate. The filibuster as it is used today doesn't promote bipartisanship. It is preventing bipartisan progress.

As I said, the proposal to form an independent commission to investigate the January 6 insurrection had broad, bipartisan support in the Senate. Six Republican colleagues had the courage to stand up and join all of the Democrats in calling for this January 6 commission. But a minority of Senators—all Republican—refused. This is not how our legislative process is supposed to function.

Our Nation's Founders wanted to give each Senator a voice, not a veto over every piece of legislation. That is how the filibuster is being misused today.

So as we celebrate the reopening of the Capitol grounds, let's take a moment to appreciate the fact our democracy has survived, but it cannot protect itself from future attacks. That responsibility falls on our shoulders. No wasting time on delay tactics; it is time to do the work that we were sent to Washington to do.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Republican whip.

ABORTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last month, Speaker PELOSI was asked if she thought a 15-week-old unborn baby was a human being. She declined to answer. A few days later, the President's Press Secretary was asked if the President thinks a 15-week-old unborn baby is a human being. She also declined to answer.

In case the President and the Speaker are in any doubt, let me just clear things up for them. A 15-week-old unborn baby is a human being. That baby has a human mom and a human dad, and human beings have other human beings. That is not a complex moral or philosophical question. That is biology 101.

Of course, I am pretty sure the reason the Speaker and the President's Press Secretary declined to answer these questions is not because they are confused about the answer. I don't think there is anybody out there who isn't aware on some level that unborn human beings are human beings. The moment of birth does not magically confer humanity.

No, the Speaker and the President don't want to admit that unborn children are human beings because admit-

ting it would make it hard to defend the fact that they support the right to kill these babies. If you support abortion, it is much easier to pretend an unborn baby is just a clump of cells rather than a separate human being with his or her own fingerprints and DNA. It is a lot easier to defend killing that baby if you pretend that baby is just a part of the mother instead of a unique, separate, unrepeatable individual.

That is why the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Press Secretary for the President of the United States have declined to answer a question any 10-year-old could answer: whether the baby inside his or her mom is a human being.

At the end of May, President Biden released his budget. It was a slap in the face to pro-life Americans. The President's budget abandons decades of bipartisan compromise and calls for the elimination of the Hyde amendment, which protects taxpayers from having their tax dollars go to fund abortions.

And that is not all. The budget contains a whole host of pro-abortion measures that would, among other things, direct taxpayer dollars to fund abortion providers here at home and overseas.

This isn't just some theatrical proposal. Democrats in the House of Representatives have already acted in committee to exclude the Hyde amendment and other pro-life measures from appropriations bills. If we can't agree that unborn human beings deserve to have their human rights protected, we should at least be able to agree that taxpayers should not be forced to fund the killing of unborn persons.

The American people don't think taxpayers should fund abortions. In fact, nearly 60 percent of Americans oppose taxpayer funding of abortions. The President himself has, as recently as his Presidential campaign, supported the Hyde amendment, but there is one interest group that controls the Democratic Party. It is the abortion industry and its supporters, and I guess the President figured that he needed to sacrifice his support for the Hyde amendment if he wanted to win the election.

And now Democrats and the President are following through by attempting to force taxpayers to pay for abortions. To hear Democrats talk, you would think abortion on demand, without limits, up until the moment of birth, was the standard position of this country and the world. But it is actually not. The United States is one of only a tiny handful of countries in the world—in the entire world—that allow elective abortions past 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Americans are squarely to the right of the Democratic Party on abortion. A strong majority of Americans believe abortion should be illegal or there should at least be some restrictions on abortion, and that has been the position of the American people for a long time.

Despite the Democrats' best efforts, Americans still aren't convinced unlimited abortion on demand should be the law of the land. It is really not surprising. No one who has ever heard the thump, thump, thump of an unborn baby's heartbeat really thinks that we are just talking about a clump of cells. No one who has ever looked at an ultrasound screen and seen an unborn baby waving her hands or kicking her feet is in any doubt that that baby is a human being.

And at some level, every person knows that human beings have human rights and that human beings deserve to be protected, even when they are small and weak and vulnerable—especially when they are small and weak and vulnerable.

No matter how hard the abortion lobby pushes, they can't convince the majority of Americans that abortion is an unqualified good. Unfortunately, however, they succeeded in turning the Democratic Party into their legislative arm. And President Biden and Democrats in Congress are obediently pursuing a radical abortion agenda that puts them squarely to the left of the majority of the American people.

It is not limited to taxpayer funding of abortion or abortion providers. President Biden nominated a radical pro-abortion crusader as the Secretary of Health and Human Services. In May, Secretary Becerra appeared before a House subcommittee where he chose to answer a question on Federal abortion law by indulging in a game of semantics. Not only did he fail to commit to enforcing the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act, he refused to even acknowledge its existence, even though he voted against the law repeatedly during his time in the House of Representatives.

Then there is the so-called Equality Act—Democrats' unprecedented assault on free speech and religious liberty that would also erode conscience protections on abortions as well as restrictions on Federal funding. Under the Equality Act, doctors and nurses who have a moral objection to participating in abortions could be forced to participate or lose their jobs.

I haven't even mentioned the Women's Health Protection Act, sponsored by almost every Democrat in the Senate, which would threaten even the mildest State limits on abortion.

It is deeply disheartening that making sure unborn children are deprived of their human rights has become a defining cause for one of the two major parties in this country. We can do better than this. We have to do better than this.

Congressman Henry Hyde, for whom the Hyde amendment was named, once noted that abortion—which, as he said, denies "an entire class of human beings the welcome and protection of our laws"—is a betrayal of "the best in our tradition."

And he was right. What kind of a message does it send to our children