

colleagues to try and garner support for this important legislation. This is a good proposal and I encourage all my Senate colleagues to support it.

That said, we must be honest about the facts. The Republican-led war on democracy has only worsened in the last few weeks. Most notably, the Governor of Texas recently signed into law a vile new voter suppression bill that ranks as one of the most draconian and undemocratic in living memory. Meanwhile, partisans across the country are sharpening their knives for a coming spate of vicious gerrymandering, which further threatens to divide our politics.

This is unacceptable. So the Senate must act. I intend to hold a vote in the Senate as early as next week on voting rights legislation. Time—time—is of the essence.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, over the State work period, as Senators attended business back home, the Biden administration's reckless decision to retreat from Afghanistan was carried through to a damaging and deadly end.

The consequences of its hasty retreat were not just foreseeable; they were actually foreseen. And yet, against the advice of Members from both parties and even its own national security experts, the administration plowed right ahead.

Just weeks after abandoning our strategic airbase in the dead of night, the Biden administration told Americans and vulnerable Afghan partners they were largely on their own to make it to the commercial airport in Kabul if they wanted out of Afghanistan.

And by the White House's own admission, some of the Americans who wanted to come home were left behind. So let's let that sink in. President Biden left Americans who wanted to escape behind, in the clutches of the Taliban.

Of course, Americans aren't the only people we left behind. In order to meet an arbitrary political deadline, the Biden administration also pulled out before we helped all the brave Afghans who stuck their necks out to assist American servicemembers and build a better future for their country.

Our Nation made a promise of aid and safety in exchange for their service; and on this President's watch, we actually failed to keep the promise. We left Americans and vulnerable Afghans behind.

The administration naively expected the Taliban to behave like any law-abiding member of the so-called international community, supposedly subject to tremendous leverage for recognition and for funding.

Well, our adversaries are sending emissaries to the Taliban, and the terrorists in Kabul seem unconcerned with diplomacy. Trust in the Taliban to ensure safe passage to the airport for evacuees was fatally misplaced. Anyone who expected the group to become "inclusive" should now rightly expect to literally be laughed out of the room.

The administration confidently insisted it would own the consequences of its withdrawal efforts; but as soon as their lack of planning bore real, deadly consequences, it pointed the blame at everyone but the reflection in the mirror.

Now, in a bizarre twist of narcissism, the White House is now holding up its belated and frantic evacuations as worthy of praise and credit.

So where are we now?

A wall outside the compound that, until recently, housed the U.S. Embassy in Kabul now bears a mural of the Taliban flag. Four terrorists once detained at Guantanamo Bay now hold senior positions in the Taliban regime. And in the void left by our coalition's withdrawal, we are less able to collect intelligence and fight terrorists on their own soil.

This failure was entirely avoidable; the consequences were totally foreseeable; and the stain on our retreat has left America more endangered, less credible, and with fewer capabilities in the face of real and growing terrorist threats.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, the international stage isn't the only area where the Biden administration's policies have caused damage that was both foreseeable and foreseen.

Back in the springtime, Washington Democrats dumped trillions of dollars in liberal borrowing and spending onto the American people. They pretended it was a COVID relief bill. What it was, was a recipe for rampant inflation, a silent tax hike on American families.

It was clear what would happen. Even liberal economists warned this was a bad idea that would cause inflation. But just like in Afghanistan, Democrats had made up their minds long ago and were certainly not going to be deterred.

Now working Americans are paying the price. Annual inflation is up 5.4 percent, tied for the worst inflation in over a decade. It has more than swamped American workers' wage gains over the last year. The Democrats' inflation is turning American workers' pay raises into effective pay cuts, essentially pick-pocketing American families.

You might think this would give our Democratic friends some pause and encourage them to deal in reality; but, alas, that is not what is happening. Instead, they are eager to jam through yet another massive multitrillion-dollar reckless taxing-and-spending spree

in an effort to move our country to the left, literally, forever.

Massive new government intrusion into Americans' childcare arrangements, into Americans' medical prescriptions, into the power grid; new welfare spending that hands out cash with zero—zero—work requirements; socialist price setting that would leave our medical system with fewer new cures; and a thousand more awful, far-left policies just like these, all accompanied by a suite of staggering—literally staggering—tax hikes that would kill jobs, hurt families, and crush our competitiveness with the Chinese.

Details are already emerging about the seismic tax hikes that Democrats are cooking up: more higher taxes on employers and job creators, targeted tax hikes to hit small businesses and family farms, pulling more Americans into the death tax.

This tax-hiking wish list would add up to one of the biggest tax hikes in American history at exactly the time their liberal policies already have our economy sputtering. So it is the very last thing American workers need. It is the last thing American families can afford, and Republicans are going to fight these terrible, painful policies tooth and nail.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of James Richard Kvaal, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary of Education.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise to speak to 9/11, the 20th anniversary, but before that, I would like to address some of the remarks made by the minority leader just a few moments ago.

He discussed, in the context of the Biden Presidency, what he called a "reckless decision to retreat from Afghanistan with an arbitrary deadline." What the Senator failed to include was the efforts made last year, before Joe Biden was elected President, by the previous President, Republican Donald Trump, through his Secretary of State, Pompeo, in direct negotiation with the Taliban, to establish the deadlines for the evacuation of Afghanistan. The idea didn't come with the new President, Joe Biden; the idea started under

the previous Republican President, Donald Trump, who sent our Secretary of State to directly negotiate with the Taliban leaders.

One of the things that they negotiated, incidentally—I want to make a record of it—was the release of 5,000 prisoners by the Afghan Government the Taliban wanted released, and President Trump negotiated their release.

Now, the Republican leader in the Senate comes and notes the fact that four Guantanamo prisoners are now in positions of power in the Taliban administration. Well, of course, that speaks for itself. But honesty would require us to note the fact that they were among the very same Taliban team President Trump negotiated with last year and now have positions of authority. There is no blame for President Biden in that score.

To say that we were naive toward the Taliban is to ignore the obvious. President Trump negotiated an agreement with them. If we would hold to a deadline for leaving Afghanistan, they would make certain that American forces were spared attacks during that period of time. That was part of the conversation. That was part of the negotiation. That in and of itself was a positive thing, but it also held us to a deadline to keep our troops safe.

The notion of working with and negotiating with the Taliban started with President Trump and Secretary of State Pompeo under the President.

As to whether the situation in the evacuation was entirely avoidable, I am not certain there was a playbook left by President Trump when he left office as to how he would have handled that evacuation.

I will say this for President Biden: I believe, as he did, that it was time for this war to come to an end. There were 2,461 American body bags—American lives lost in the war in Afghanistan. More than 20,000 of our troops were seriously injured during the course of that war. There was \$2 trillion spent in 20 years on a war that seemed like it would never end. And we spent most of that money in an effort to build up an Afghan security force that would take care of itself so America could come home. And what happened? As soon as the United States said there would be an end to this, sadly, many of these Afghan soldiers—uniformed, paid for, and equipped by the U.S. taxpayers—threw their guns down and surrendered, and then, of course, the administration of the Government in Afghanistan left the scene completely.

So I am one who voted for the invasion of Afghanistan for obvious reasons. That is where Osama bin Laden was supposedly hiding out with al-Qaida, responsible for the 9/11 atrocity, which we have noted the 20th anniversary of this week. But I don't believe anyone on the floor in this Senate envisioned a war that would go on to be the longest war in American history. That is what happened.

The second issue raised by the Republican leader notes that the Amer-

ican Rescue Plan was a recipe for inflation, and he called it a "tax hike upon working families." Let's clear up that record.

The American Rescue Plan was suggested by President Biden. The goals of that plan were several. The goals included the administration of coronavirus vaccines across America, which has taken place in one of the most effective efforts ever to make it available. I am sorry that some 30 percent of Americans refuse to be vaccinated, but it has nothing to do with the availability of the vaccine. President Biden kept his word to bring that vaccine to the American people, and that was part of the American Rescue Plan. I don't know if the Senator from Kentucky is questioning the wisdom of that, but it is a fact.

The second thing it did was to provide a \$1,400 payment, if you will remember, that had been promised by President Trump, and we completed and kept that promise with the American Rescue Plan, so dollar assistance for families across America, including working families, let me add. And also then came the child tax credits. It was the most extraordinary effort made by our government to help families raising children—cash payments through the end of this year. To argue that this is somehow a tax on working families is to ignore the fact that it is the biggest tax break in the history of this country for working families.

How many Republicans supported us for the \$1,400 cash payment to families, for the plan to administer the vaccine across America, for the help for families with children, for more assistance for businesses? Not one. Not one Republican vote in support of the American Rescue Plan.

To hear the theory that was given just a few moments ago by the Republican leader is to ignore the obvious: That plan was essential to this country coming to grips with this pandemic and starting to get this economy back on its feet.

The Senator from Kentucky has characterized our reconciliation bill as reckless, and he talks about the massive tax increases. He forgets one particular element. What we are doing is reversing the tax breaks given by the Trump administration 4 years ago to the wealthiest people in America. Yes, their taxes will go up. But President Biden has made it clear that there will be no tax increases for anyone making less than \$400,000 a year. So if we are talking about a new tax burden, it is on people who can certainly afford to pay, and it reverses the tax cut which many of the Republicans—I think virtually all of them—at the time voted for.

SEPTEMBER 11

Madam President, I want to tell you about an extraordinary person from my State. Dan Shanower grew up in Naperville, just outside of Chicago—one of five kids in his family. In college, he spent a semester at Wash-

ington, DC, as part of American University's Washington Semester Program. He managed to become an intern here on Capitol Hill for U.S. Senator Charles Percy from Illinois.

An opportunity like that can change your outlook on life. I know it changed mine when I was an intern for Senator Paul Douglas. It changed Dan Shanower's mind, and he started thinking about what he could do by way of public service.

He wasn't interested in politics, though. So after college, he enlisted in the Navy. He became an intelligence officer. He served in the Persian Gulf war and in assignments around the globe.

On September 11, 2001, Dan Shanower was on duty at the Pentagon. He was hurriedly gathering papers to brief his superiors on the attack on the World Trade Center, when American Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon and took his life.

Navy CDR Dan Shanower was one of 125 servicemembers and civilians who lost their lives in the Pentagon on 9/11; one of the 2,977 Americans lost to the terrorist attacks that fatal day. He was 40 years old. Two years later, the people of Naperville, IL, dedicated a memorial to his honor on the Riverwalk, on the banks of the DuPage River. It was one of America's first 9/11 memorials. This past Saturday, the victims and heroes of 9/11 were remembered at the memorial in Naperville.

Twenty years after the attacks, the remembrances of that year seem to contain a new kind of sadness, not only for those who perished—rest their souls—but for all we have lost in the years since. Amid our shock and grief following 9/11, Americans were sustained by acts of heroism, sacrifice, compassion, and a deep sense of national unity.

I watch "60 Minutes" every week. Last night, I saw the program that they dedicated to the New York Fire Department and 9/11. It was touching, emotional, and heartbreaking. I had tears in my eyes as they told the stories of the 343 firemen who went into those buildings to rescue the people who were there. They told their stories even with their voices from radio transmissions and the voices of those victims in the building praying that someone would rescue them. It was a touching moment and a reminder of what true courage looks like.

We have a responsibility now to ask a basic question about our responsibility when it comes to the people in this country. Do you remember the national unity that we felt after 9/11? That tragedy brought us together. Imagine then—fast-forward, if you will, to January 6, 2021, when the insurrectionist mob overran this Capitol.

I was in this Capitol on 9/11, meeting just off the floor. We heard that the first plane had crashed into the World Trade Center, and we went and turned on the television to see if there was any further news and saw in real time