

an increase in the debt limit to pay for all of that spending.

I think that is a fair—very fair way to look at this. It strikes me, at least, that since the Democrats have embarked upon this one-party-rule approach, that if they are going to spend another \$3½ to \$5½ trillion, that they ought to raise the debt limit to accommodate all that additional spending. I think that is a reasonable way to approach this, and I, frankly, think it is consistent if you look at what has happened in the past.

The last time we raised the debt limit was in the summer of 2019. That was a bipartisan deal, and it was a bipartisan deal that actually put caps on spending. We were limiting spending as we were raising the debt limit. Republicans and Democrats joined together at the time to do that.

The spending that I referenced in March of 2020, the \$4½ trillion or thereabouts that was spent on the response to the pandemic, was also bipartisan. In fact, it was so bipartisan, it passed in the Senate 96 to 0. Does anybody here ever remember anything around here passing 96 to 0, particularly of that consequence? Clearly—clearly—there was strong bipartisan support for doing something that needed to be done in response to the worst pandemic we have seen in this country in a century.

Those were things that were done in a bipartisan fashion. Now, this is an entirely different scenario. And I don't think anybody can dispute the fact that the Democrats, as they embark upon this \$3½ trillion reckless tax-and-spending spree, and, again, other estimates—the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget says it is not \$3½ trillion; it is actually \$5½ trillion when you look at the spend out in the various budget windows and timelines.

But let's just say for the sake of argument that it is \$3½ trillion to \$5½ trillion. It is still a massive amount of spending, none of which is related to the coronavirus, all of which is part of a dramatic expansion of government, which I have referred to before here on the floor as the “free everything” bill—literally cradle to grave, the government, the Federal Government, will take care of you—in addition to a lot of other leftwing agenda priorities like green energy provisions and all sorts of things in this that are Democratic priorities with no buy-in from Republicans, no attempt to reach out to Republicans or to do anything in a bipartisan way.

This is a strictly, purely partisan exercise in which the Democrats are trying to include things that have absolutely no relationship to spending, debt, or revenues, which is what the reconciliation process is designed for.

They are talking about doing immigration—immigration—major, major policy that needs to be done on a bipartisan basis that affects this country in a profound way, as we can see from the crisis at the border. Already in the

month of July of this year, there was a 420-percent increase over the previous year in the number of illegal crossings. Two hundred and twelve thousand people came across the border illegally just in the month of July. It is a major, consequential crisis. The Democrats are going to try to do something to legalize people who are here illegally without addressing the other elements of the immigration debate on a strictly partisan basis as a part of the reconciliation bill. This is a purely, purely partisan exercise done without any input from Republicans.

I don't think there is a single Republican who ought to be pushed into or feel like they in any way need to support the massive expansion of government we are talking about here, the trillions and trillions and trillions of dollars in new spending.

That is what the debt limit is about. It is about raising the amount of debt, the amount that this country can borrow, to pay for a massive expansion—massive expansion, reckless expansion—of our government that moves us more in the direction of a Western European social democracy rather than the American country that I think we all know and love.

We have a heritage in this country. It is built around freedom. It is built around individual responsibility. It is built on the need to protect our country and maintain a strong national defense. I think that is one thing I hope that, as we look at spending, we can agree upon.

But this massive expansion of what they call social or human infrastructure is nothing more and nothing less than the biggest expansion of government that we have seen literally in decades, and it will be financed—some—with tax increases, which I could spend a lot of time talking about, which will harm the economy, but also with additional debt.

And that debt, the debt that is acquired for the huge runup in spending that will be supported purely by Democrats through reconciliation, a procedure that is a partisan procedure, that ought to be paid for—that ought to be done by Democrat votes. And it can be done. There is a way in which the reconciliation procedure can be used to raise the debt limit to pay for all of the new spending that the Democrats have in this bill.

So when they get down here and talk about how important it is to be bipartisan, well, it would be one thing if there was actually any kind of a bipartisan negotiation going on, but there isn't. And the last time the debt limit was raised, there was, in 2019, and at that time it was about caps. It was about reducing spending. There was a bipartisan agreement to reduce spending as the debt limit was being increased.

The other thing I would mention in response to what the majority leader said earlier is that the debt that was accumulated in the previous adminis-

tration, much of which was done on a bipartisan basis in response to the biggest pandemic that this country has seen in a hundred years, in March of 2020—\$4.5 trillion of that debt was put on the bill because of a bipartisan agreement that was reached, as I said earlier, 96 to 0. Ninety-six to 0 was the vote here in the U.S. Senate.

So Democrats want to go down this path. If they want to spend, spend, spend like there is no tomorrow and tax, tax, tax like there is no tomorrow and borrow, borrow, borrow like there is no tomorrow, then they ought to pay, pay, pay with their votes when it comes to raising the debt limit and, unfortunately, handing the bill for that to our kids and grandkids.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, 20 years ago, on a clear September morning, the unthinkable happened: an attack on our Nation here at home on our own soil. Almost 3,000 Americans died that day, and our Nation reeled. But in the midst of grief and fear, there was also hope.

We saw evil on September 11, but in the days and weeks that followed, we saw good as well: the first responders who raced to the scene and spent the weeks after combing through the rubble, the heroic Americans who fought back against the terrorists on United Flight No. 93, the hours-long lines for blood donations as Americans scrambled to do anything they could to help.

And out of the ashes of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the field near Shanksville, PA, came a new birth of patriotism and resolve. America might be bloodied, but she would not break. Evil and terror would not win.

The 9/11 generation of warriors and intelligence personnel took the fight to the terrorists in the Middle East and around the world. Our men and women in uniform dismantled terrorist safe havens, disrupted terrorist groups, thwarted attacks, and hunted down and delivered justice to Osama bin Laden.

In Afghanistan, the downfall of the Taliban at the hands of our soldiers and our NATO allies allowed a generation of Afghans to grow up in freedom.

I was honored to get to spend part of September 11 with members of the South Dakota Air National Guard, many of whom served overseas in the fight against terrorism.

As we marked the 20th anniversary of September 11 on Saturday, our soldiers and our veterans should have been able to reflect on their successes in the fight against terrorism over the past two decades, but I know that today many of them are struggling with the recent events in Afghanistan.

The U.S. disastrous, hasty withdrawal is a stain on our Nation's history and a betrayal of the men and women who fought there. But I hope they know that their sacrifices and the sacrifices of their comrades were not in vain. As I said, their actions enabled a generation of Afghans to grow up free from the oppressive hand of the

Taliban and kept the country from being a haven for al-Qaida and other terrorists.

Despite the grim current situation in Afghanistan, I am convinced that the seeds of freedom sown by our military men and women will yet bear fruit on Afghan soil.

I and many others warned that a total troop withdrawal in Afghanistan that ignored conditions on the ground was going to be a strategic disaster, and it has been. The United States has historically maintained a limited military presence in foreign countries when it is in our national security interest to do so. And with the presence of just 2,500 to 3,000 troops, we were maintaining stability for a country that was fighting to find its way toward freedom and democracy and simultaneously protecting the interests of our own country.

All of that, of course, is now at an end. President Biden's disastrous decision to completely withdraw U.S. troops on a timeline he announced to our enemies allowed the Taliban to bide their time until our ultimate departure. American citizens are still trapped in Afghanistan, and thousands of Afghans who worked with U.S. troops and U.S. intelligence are in great danger.

And Afghanistan is well on its way to once again becoming a terrorist haven. In fact, the Taliban has already appointed terrorists to top posts in its new government. There is also every reason to fear that government oppression will once again become the norm in Afghanistan, particularly—particularly—for women and girls.

We heard over and over again that President Biden was going to restore America's standing in the world and repair our relationships with our allies, particularly our NATO allies. In fact, he has done the opposite. His Afghanistan disaster is a national embarrassment. He failed our troops; he failed the American people; he failed our allies; and he failed the Afghans who risked their lives with and for us.

The Parliament of a key U.S. ally, the United Kingdom, condemned President Biden in the strongest terms for his dishonorable withdrawal from Afghanistan. The fact that we have left behind thousands of Afghans who worked with our country and whom we promised to protect is unconscionable. It is a stain on our country's record that will not easily be wiped away.

I hope—I really hope—that the President does everything within his power to get Afghans who worked with us and any remaining U.S. citizens out of the country as soon as humanly possible.

In the coming weeks, the relevant committees in the House and Senate need to conduct thorough oversight and investigations to understand why this withdrawal was done in a manner that further empowered and strengthened the Taliban and their al-Qaida allies. We also need to discover why there was no effective plan to get our

citizens and our Afghan allies to safety.

The scenes of chaos at Hamid Karzai Airport should never have happened, and we need to find out why they did. Thirteen brave Americans died protecting our withdrawal: 11 marines, 1 soldier, and 1 sailor. It is hard not to wonder if their deaths could have been avoided had there been a better plan in place for evacuation. The families of these men and women and the American people deserve answers, and the Biden administration must provide it.

The weeks of August 2021 will live in infamy. The President's ill-considered, untimely withdrawal and complete lack of an effective plan to evacuate Americans and our Afghan allies created a humanitarian crisis and the conditions that allowed the Taliban to swiftly take over the country.

The President's actions have helped condemn women and girls and the entire Afghan people to once again live under pre-9/11 oppression, and he has emboldened terrorists and increased the security risk facing our Nation.

It is tragic that all the good we have done in Afghanistan has come to this.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The Senator from Alabama.

HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, sometimes we don't all agree on things here in this Chamber, but I think we can all agree that a quality education has the power to uplift and transform someone's life. It is the key to freedom and the key to opportunity.

I know this because I have seen it firsthand. I have coached and mentored hundreds of student athletes over my 40-year career. I witnessed the difference an education can make in the outcome of someone's life, how it truly creates a pathway to success.

In fact, that is one of the reasons I was inspired to be an advocate for better educational opportunities for all Americans—because investing in our children's education is investing in our country. It is like putting a downpayment on our country's future success by creating opportunity.

I have recruited hundreds and hundreds of students from across our country. I have been in their homes. I have seen how they live, and I have seen how they have grown up. Unfortunately, for many children from difficult backgrounds, a large percent coming from one- or no-parent homes, real opportunities can be hard to come by—very hard.

Regardless of what town that they lived in or what their family was like, I wanted my athletes to know that education can open many, many doors. Most of them understood and appreciated. As I have said many times before, the only thing that this country owes you as a citizen is an opportunity, and I still believe that is true.

There is a lot that goes into making the decision to go to college. Students

often think first about the cost, or they could be the first in their families to attend college. My parents didn't attend college. One worked in manufacturing. The other worked on a line. They were very supportive of my decision, but I still had to figure out a lot on my own, and it is a huge decision.

But there is always the question: Is this the right place for me? Will this school provide me with a path forward for success and a productive future?

Many students across the country have turned to historically Black colleges and universities, better known as HBCUs, to answer these questions because of the pathway HBCUs provide. While they are respected for their strong traditions, HBCUs are the ultimate opportunity creators for students all across this country. Serving nearly 300,000 students annually in 21 States and territories, HBCUs have made tuition costs more affordable, costing 30 percent less, on average, than other higher education institutions. And because of that, 60 percent of the HBCU attendees are low-income, first-generation college students. HBCUs not only knock down barriers, but they build upon the inherent potential of their attendees.

I am proud that the great State of Alabama is home to 13 HBCUs, the most of any State in the Nation. These colleges are major contributors to communities across our State, producing more than 15,000 jobs annually for our local economies. And they also prepare students for the 21st-century job market.

Let me tell you a bit about some of the great things that HBCUs in my State have accomplished. Among their many contributions, Alabama HBCUs have helped to fill the continuing need for more African Americans in STEM—or science, technology, engineering, and math—professions. For companies desperate to recruit top talent for entry-level STEM roles, HBCUs offer thousands of highly qualified candidates.

As part of this effort, Alabama State University offers the Minority Science and Engineering Improvement Program. This program focuses on giving undergrad STEM students a chance at hands-on research and professional development opportunities. In fact, Alabama State University just announced a new partnership with Apple where it will become a center for coding and creativity.

In Montgomery, Trenholm State offers free STEM courses for dual enrollment students to allow high school students to get a jump start on their college careers.

But it is also important to recognize that HBCUs support low-income, first-generation college students in meeting and exceeding their postsecondary educational goals.

Alabama A&M University recently announced its new master's apprenticeship program for social work—the first of its kind by any HBCU in the country. This investment in our students