

act from the Feds. If Democrats at the local, State, and Federal levels want fewer parents—concerned parents—showing up at school board meetings, the solution is to stop indoctrinating the kids with crazy messages on the taxpayers' dime, not trying to use Federal law enforcement to frighten families out of their First Amendment rights.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Madam President, now on a totally different matter, in recent years, Washington Democrats have shown an alarming willingness to invent crises to justify radical ideas. They have tried to vilify our independent judiciary and exhume the concept of court-packing from the ash heap of history. They have tried to sell a 50-State Federal takeover of election laws by fearmongering about mainstream and reasonable State decisions. When it came to an actual crisis, a once-in-a-century pandemic, Democrats didn't even try to conceal their intentions. As the House majority whip put it back in March of 2020, it was all "a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision."

With unified control of government, they bragged this spring about passing the most progressive legislation in American history. This first spending spree expanded Federal supplements to unemployment insurance so massively that the best choice for huge numbers of skilled American workers was simply to stay home—stay home. The whole thing was an avalanche of cash that stunted our economic recovery and, of course, accelerated inflation.

Now Washington Democrats are behind closed doors again, assembling an even bigger reckless taxing-and-spending spree. It is meant to be a Trojan horse for permanent socialism—conclusive proof that the radical left is calling the shots in today's Democratic Party. I have talked about the laundry list of leftwing boondoggles that our colleagues are packing into this plan. At the heart of it all is one simple and dangerous assumption: that American families ought to be more reliant on the Federal Government.

Democrats' plans would chase more Americans off of the private health insurance plans they chose and onto government rolls. They would shred a decades-old consensus about the importance of work and massively expand cash grants to families without any employment requirements—without any employment requirements. They want to reinvent welfare without welfare reform. There is giveaway after giveaway that isn't even means tested. Their plans have literally proposed to have taxpayers fund free school lunch for the kids of millionaires and billionaires—no means testing whatsoever. None.

In addition, Washington Democrats want to insert themselves into the middle of the most personal family decisions about childcare and family structure, redistributing huge amounts

of money only to households that arrange their lives the way Democrats want.

In area after area, Democrats want to implement far-left policies that would make the economy worse for working families and then clumsily try to make it up to citizens with socialism that is disconnected from work. This is a frontal assault on the nature of employment and work itself in American life.

They are out to, as one economist put it, "fundamentally change the relationship between the state and its citizens." Even the New York Times last month called what Democrats are hammering out "a cradle-to-grave reweaving" of the government's role. Lower wages. Fewer jobs. At least American workers will have cradle-to-grave socialism.

It is one vision for the future, all right, but it is not one that Americans want, and it is one that Senate Republicans will fight every step of the way. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, \$28 trillion, \$9,700 per person. It is common for Members of this Senate to stand on the Senate floor and debate the pricetag of spending bills and legislation that costs millions, billions, and even trillions of dollars. These numbers are so large that for many people—perhaps even for us—it is incomprehensible and unrelatable.

Today, I would like to take a moment to talk about dollars and cents. In Kansas, the current average price for a gallon of gas is \$3.09. Last year, the average cost per gallon of gas in Kansas was \$1.93. This means filling up a 15-gallon tank will cost you an extra \$17 every time you fill up your car at the pump. If you fill up your vehicle once a week, that is an additional \$904 you spent on gas this year as opposed to just last year.

Electricity prices are up 5.2 percent this year. The average monthly electric bill for a residence in Kansas last year was \$113.52. A 5-percent increase is an additional \$68 per family.

This winter is going to be expensive for American families, particularly in the Midwest, as households are expected to see their heating bills jump as much as 54 percent compared to last winter, making it the most expensive winter since 2008.

Thanks to inflation, the price of eggs is up 9.9 percent. A used car is going to be about 24 percent more expensive. Chicken has a 7.2-percent increase in cost, in price.

In fact, these realities are being reflected by media across the country.

Newsweek's headline: "Your Thanksgiving Turkey Could Be the Most Expensive Ever."

MSNBC: "Thanksgiving is now less than a month away and it's shaping up to be the most expensive meal in the history of the holiday."

CBS News: "On the table for Thanksgiving this year? Higher food prices."

NBC News: "This Thanksgiving, be prepared to fork over more dough for your feast."

And The New York Times: "This Year's Thanksgiving Feast Will Wallop the Wallet."

This is horrible news for almost every Kansan and for every American, and it is especially damaging to those who are already struggling to pay the bills because their hard-earned dollars just don't go far enough now.

An extra \$17 at the gas pump or \$68 on an electric bill and an extra 50 cents here or there is quickly adding up, for middle-class and low-income families, to be a major challenge.

These dollars add up to tough decisions, like: Will we be able to make our mortgage payment this month? Do we forgo a Thanksgiving meal this year so we can keep the heat on? Can we afford to make the drive across the country to see the grandparents for the holidays?

The current trajectory for inflation doesn't look good either. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said on Sunday that the United States hasn't experienced the recent inflation levels in a "long time" and expects higher inflation to continue into 2022.

Part of inflation—a significant portion of inflation is caused by government spending, and the Democrats' out-of-control spending and policies have sped up the rate of inflation, creating these higher prices for families.

In particular, President Biden's effort to restrain American oil and gas production—this one is not about spending, but it is about policy. President Biden's efforts to restrain American oil and gas production while, oddly, hypocritically, strangely, appealing to OPEC to increase the global oil supply in the face of high gas prices at home has resulted in higher energy prices, which could drive inflation even higher in the months to come.

It is time for Congress to turn off the spending spigot. The Democrats' nearly \$2 trillion spending package that passed at the beginning of this session, in January, did nothing to help with our labor shortage or to improve the supply chain. It, instead, accelerated inflation around the country. We have been slow to turn that spigot off, and we have exacerbated it since the arrival of a Democrat majority and President Biden in the White House.

The Democrats are awfully busy trying to fill their campaign promises by passing their tax-and-spending spree, and they are too busy to worry about the damage they are causing American families. More spending will only exacerbate our current inflationary circumstances, and the path that the

Democrats have charted involves massive amounts of spending that will lead to higher prices for everyone.

As Americans face higher prices at the gas station and grocery store, we must work at fixing our supply chain issues, returning to being energy independent, helping Americans return to work, and reining in our spending to slow down the rate of inflation. This out-of-control spending is jeopardizing our economy and hurting Americans.

To my colleagues—to my Democrat colleagues, in particular—rather than assuming a mandate by the voters and pushing the tax-and-spend spree legislation with 51 votes, let's work together. Let's work together to get government spending and borrowing in check. If this is done, it will be done for the well-being of all Americans.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, work continues on Democrats' socialist spending spree, and the Senate seems to be on track to vote on their bill in the near future. Well, maybe. It depends on who you ask at any given time around here these days.

Just to highlight the high level of uncertainty surrounding this process, President Biden was on Capitol Hill just this morning—his second visit this month—to twist the arms of still-undecided Democrats.

As they continue to see what sticks to the wall, it is good to know that priorities like government jobs for climate activists, tax credits for environmental justice programs at colleges and universities, and a \$200 million park in Speaker PELOSI's district may soon come up for a vote in the Senate. It is just too bad that Democrats have been so focused on expanding government that they haven't actually taken time to do some of the essential business of government.

Fiscal year 2021 ended a month ago. We are into fiscal year 2022. Yet, so far, the Senate has not taken up a single appropriations bill for the 2022 fiscal year.

On the other hand, perhaps it is not surprising, since the 2022 appropriations bills recently introduced by the committee chair are rabidly partisan productions packed with poison pills, that one can only assume are designed to make the bills fail: the taxpayer

funding of abortion, a measure that would allow Democrats to use the IRS for partisan purposes, policies that would allow certain criminal illegal aliens to be released into the United States.

Well, we may be better off without these bills.

One bill—of which there is no question we should have taken up months ago, however—is the National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA is one of the most important bills we consider each year. It authorizes funding for national defense priorities, like critical upgrades to our defense capabilities, as well as funding for our military men and women—from pay increases to protective equipment, to investments in Impact Aid.

It is not a bill we can afford to ignore, but under Senate Democrats, the bill has taken a back seat to Democrats' pet priority, and that is this massive, partisan tax-and-spending legislation. So, while Democrats focus on expanding the size of government, critical military priorities are going unauthorized and unfunded.

Without the National Defense Authorization Act, and then the Defense appropriations bill that falls from it, the military can't sign off on contracts for critical new equipment. Shipbuilding projects, military infrastructure projects, the development of new combat systems—they are all having to wait while Democrats negotiate over their socialist spending spree.

In my home State of South Dakota, Ellsworth Air Force Base is currently preparing to be the first home of the B-21 bomber, where we will host both the Formal Training Unit and first operational squadron.

The B-21 bomber will eventually replace the Air Force's aging B-1 fleet and ensure that we have a long-range strike asset and leg of the nuclear triad capable of meeting the threats of the 21st century, wherever in the world they are found.

This year's NDAA authorizes critical funding for developing the B-21 and starting to transform Ellsworth to prepare for the mission, plus a requirement to maintain the remaining B-1 fleet until the bombers can be replaced by the B-21.

This is just one of the many critical national security investments we cannot afford to delay, but I guess our military men and women will just have to understand that Democrats' socialist spending spree takes priority.

It is not just our military men and women or appropriations bills that have had to take a back seat to the Democrats' burning desire to expand the size of government and its reach into Americans' lives. With their single-minded focus on their tax-and-spending spree and, of course, on federalizing election law to give themselves a permanent advantage in future elections, real crises facing our Nation seem to barely register on Democrats' radar.

We are in the midst of a serious, increasingly long-term inflation problem—a problem Democrats helped to trigger by dumping a lot of unnecessary government money into the economy earlier this year; yet Democrats are not only ignoring this crisis, they are preparing to make things worse by dumping even more government money into our economy.

SOUTHERN BORDER

Mr. President, then there is the crisis at the southern border. U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered 192,000 individuals attempting to cross our southern border in September, a 233-percent increase from the previous September—233 percent. Customs and Border Protection apprehended more than 1.7 million individuals attempting to cross our southern border in fiscal year 2021—the highest number ever.

We have a security, enforcement, and humanitarian crisis at our southern border, and there is no sign that things are getting any better. Yet you could be forgiven for wondering if Democrats have even noticed.

I am pretty sure the President and his administration spent more time earlier this year fighting against the use of the word "crisis" to describe the situation at the border than they did actually thinking about how they might deal with the influx. The President's main response to the situation seems to be ignoring it in hopes that it will go away. He is happy to travel all over the place, whether to a campaign rally in Virginia or a climate change summit overseas, but he can't seem to find a minute to visit the southern border.

The border crisis is not the only crisis the President is ignoring. The President's disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal was a real low point for this country. Thirteen of our military men and women died in the terrorist attack. We abandoned thousands of individuals who had worked with us in Afghanistan and whom we had promised to protect, not to mention hundreds of Americans still working to find a way home. The President, who was supposed to restore our standing on the world stage, left our allies wondering if our word can be relied upon.

Most of all, the disastrous withdrawal has left our country in a much more precarious national security position. Afghanistan is ripe to once again become a terrorist haven. Just this week, a Pentagon official testified that ISIS-K, the ISIS Afghanistan affiliate, could be ready to launch terrorist attacks on our homeland in as little as 6 months—6 months. Al-Qaida, which looks set to once again find a safe haven in Afghanistan, could be ready to launch attacks in a year.

Yet, once again, this barely seems to register on the Biden administration's radar. We still have no agreements with neighboring countries to establish or make use of bases to launch counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. The administration is apparently