

fact, many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle proudly previously worked on and supported passage of those updates, including preclearance provisions. It should be no different today.

For months, Senate Democrats have bent over backwards to find common ground with Republicans on the critical issue of protecting the freedom to vote. We have urged Senate Republicans to engage, to offer their ideas, to come together to guarantee free and fair elections to all Americans. I have made clear time and time again: Democrats are open for business; we want Republicans to engage. I am prepared to offer an open and honest, full-fledged process here on the Senate floor tomorrow, where Republican amendments will be made in order and allowed and debated, but for that to happen, Republicans must come to the table when we vote tomorrow. We can't force so much as a debate if at least 10 Republicans don't join us and vote in favor of letting the Senate do its work on this most important, this most vital of issues.

Senate Republicans shouldn't be afraid of merely starting debate on an issue we have long debated in this body and long supported in a bipartisan way in the past. If they have different ideas on how to achieve a stronger democracy, they owe it to the American people to come forward and debate their ideas. Simply standing silent with their arms crossed, refusing to allow the Senate to function, is unacceptable.

BUILD BACK BETTER

Mr. President, now on Build Back Better, today, Democrats in the House and Senate continue making progress on passing President Biden's Build Back Better plan. Last night, I held another round of talks with my leadership team, with the Speaker, with the White House. With many, we are discussing so many issues, including moving forward on prescription drugs. We are moving ahead, we are working through the outstanding details, and we remain committed to getting something big done for the American people.

Nobody is getting everything they hoped for in the final deal, but Build Back Better will have things that everyone—everyone—wanted. Even as we continue finalizing the text, the President's framework already—already—has done very good and important things that will dramatically improve the lives of everyday Americans. It makes historic progress on childcare, pre-K, fighting climate change, providing tax cuts for the middle class, housing, and more.

In years past, passing any one of these items would have been considered a huge step forward for the country. Now, we are working to get them all done at once, and we will continue making progress.

The framework's provisions on childcare alone would be the largest in American history. Our country's need

for childcare has grown dramatically since the 20th century. According to the Treasury Department, in fact, the average cost of caring for a young child hovers around \$10,000 a year. Many people pay more for childcare than they pay for their mortgage. Ten thousand dollars a year is simply out of reach for far too many families.

Not only do our kids suffer when they can't have somewhere safe to stay, our families suffer when they can't enter the workforce, and ultimately our country suffers as our economy's productivity is diminished.

Build Back Better, with its unprecedented investments to help families better afford childcare, would finally provide parents the help they have needed for decades.

That is just one example. American families under this framework will for the first time also have access to universal pre-K for 3- and 4-year-olds across the country. It also extends the child tax credit passed earlier this year so parents can better afford things like groceries and diapers and utilities and other daily essentials. Since its enactment, this program alone has already cut poverty—child poverty—in half in this country. That is an amazing accomplishment and one that will continue to go forward under this proposal.

So President Biden's Build Back Better framework is a historic step forward for families, but that is not all. The framework would also make bold investments to tackle the climate crisis.

The consequences of climate change are already severe. Every time we face another major heat wave, it endangers the lives of Americans who work outdoors. Every time another hurricane hits the east coast or the South, it risks destroying people's homes and schools and churches and small businesses. Every time another wildfire rages in the West, it fills the air with poisonous smoke that entire cities breathe in, consequences yet unknown.

Build Back Better would help our country fight this climate threat with unprecedented investments in clean manufacturing, clean transportation, clean electricity, and clean buildings, so we can cut our emissions, make our communities healthier, and lead the world by the power of our example. While there still would be much, much more work needed to protect our planet, this framework is a bold step in the right direction.

Now, of course, even as we continue to negotiations, the President's Build Back Better framework contains many other good things. It will help Americans keep a safe and stable roof over their heads with long-sought investments in new affordable housing, as well as ensuring that we keep housing affordable for low- and moderate-income families.

I have been working night and day with my colleagues in both Chambers and the White House to make progress

on lowering the costs of prescription drugs. I am very hopeful there will be an agreement as early as today that will include landmark reforms sought by the American people and the Democratic Party for decades.

For the first time, Medicare will be empowered to negotiate prescription drug prices in Part B and Part D. There will be an annual cap on out-of-pocket costs, a new monthly cap on the price of insulin, and an "inflation" rebate policy to protect consumers from egregious annual increases in prices.

These policies are common sense and overwhelmingly supported by the American people. The deal will finally lower the costs of prescription drugs for seniors and working families. It doesn't do everything I would want or many of us would want, but it takes a big step forward.

All the while, Build Back Better will be fully paid for and will ultimately relieve our Nation's inflationary pressures. Don't take my word for it. Many leading economists have made clear that this legislation would improve—not worsen—inflation in the country. There are a lot of good things in this framework, and Democrats are moving forward to get a final agreement and this bill over the finish line.

Nobody said that transformative legislation of this scale would be easy, quick, or simple, but we remain committed to meeting our ultimate goal of helping working- and middle-class families achieve the American dream in the 21st century.

We want to help those in the middle class stay there. They are worried about their future and the future of their children. We want to help those struggling to get to the middle class get there more easily by building ladders that they can climb. It is so important we get this done. This is the best opportunity we have had in a long time to make that a reality, so we will continue marching ahead.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Finally, very quickly, on judges. Mr. President, here is a number that everyone watching the work of the Senate should take note of: 28.

That is the number of Federal judges that, after yesterday's confirmations of Beth Robinson and Toby Heytens, the Senate has confirmed in a time of 9 months since President Biden took the oath of office: 28 judges—19 to serve on district courts, 9 to serve as appellate judges.

And the vast majority of these new judges are people of color, a majority of them being women, and many from backgrounds that have long been overlooked in selection of our Nation's judges.

This is more judges put in this period of time, the first year—the first 9 months of the President's—10 months of the President's first term—than has happened in a very long time.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 312.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert Luis Santos, of Texas, to be Director of the Census for a term expiring December 31, 2026. (Reappointment).

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 312, Robert Luis Santos, of Texas, to be Director of the Census for a term expiring December 31, 2026. (Reappointment).

Charles E. Schumer, Chris Van Hollen, John Hickenlooper, Brian Schatz, Tina Smith, Jeff Merkley, Tammy Duckworth, Patrick J. Leahy, Christopher A. Coons, Sheldon Whitehouse, Ben Ray Lujan, Christopher Murphy, Martin Heinrich, Robert P. Casey, Jr., Michael F. Bennet, Ron Wyden, Raphael Warnock.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, since the earliest days of COVID-19, Washington Democrats have admitted they want to use the pandemic as the pretext to permanently transform our country. They hope to use the temporary crisis as a Trojan horse for permanent radical change. One of their massive, ideological goals is a huge series of disruptive changes to American families' childcare.

The story is like Democrats' long march toward socialized medicine:

take an intimate area of American life, pile on a maze of new mandates, regulations, cost increases and subsidies, and push families out of the driver's seat so Washington can run their lives.

Not too long ago, the Democrats' promise that "if you liked your healthcare plan, you could keep it" was awarded the "lie of the year."

Now they want a sequel: If you like your childcare, you can keep your childcare.

Democrats want to sweep the first 5 years of children's lives into a new set of top-down, one-size-fits-all, Washington-knows-best regulations.

Their Big Government scheme would make childcare more expensive and use taxpayer money to subsidize only some families—those who structure their arrangements in ways that Democrats like. Other families would be left to fend for themselves, now in an even more inflated market.

Their bill would give Democrats and bureaucrats massive new authority they could use to shape curriculum and standards nationwide. If providers don't play along, they could be left out in the cold.

The Biden administration wants to insert itself into the most intimate family decisions and tell parents how to care for their toddlers. The entire scheme violates the basic principle of family fairness.

Speaker PELOSI suggested last week that she approves of one kind of family structure: "Parents earning and children learning."

She said Democrats want government programs to "liberat[e]" families so that both parents work full time.

Well, there are lots of families like that model, but other families prefer other models. Not everybody defines "liberation" the same way, yet Washington Democrats want Big Government to bless certain family arrangements and not others.

Has your family made a different set of sacrifices so a father or mother can parent full time?

Sorry, Democrats want to redistribute money away from your family to other households that may earn even more money.

Has your family built its whole life around a plan for a grandparent to provide in-home care?

Too bad. Grandma or Grandpa would have to fill out paperwork and apply for the bureaucrats' blessing or that family could be denied help also.

Democrats could easily end up taxing working-class families with a full-time parent in order to subsidize the arrangements of wealthier two-income households. They are steamrolling over family fairness, over families' choices and options, over the diversity of American families and their aspirations.

By the way, Democrats appear to want to change the law in ways that could force faith-based providers to put aside sincerely held religious beliefs.

Just look at who would be administering all this. One key player would

be HHS Secretary Becerra—the partisan California lawyer who got famous by suing Catholic nuns for being too Catholic and crisis pregnancy centers for being pro-life—a hardcore culture warrior.

And this person is going to be the new national czar for early childhood?

Another key figure would be Secretary Cardona. You may recall, a few months back, Senate Republicans had to stop our Education Secretary from diverting funding for civics education towards woke propaganda that had been debunked by historians.

And this is the same Biden administration whose Attorney General just wrote an entire memo singling out concerned parents who speak up at their local school board meetings. Now they want to extend their Federal control over babies and toddlers as well.

Finally—get this—this tangled new entitlement would be so mind-bogglingly expensive that Democrats can't even put a long-term dollar amount on it. The estimate is that all this government meddling will cost \$400 billion over just the first several years. After that, nobody really knows what the blank check will add up to.

Taxpayers are supposed to pony up a blank check for the privilege of having less control over family choices. I think the American people will take a pass.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, now, on another matter, each year, the National Defense Authorization Act represents the Senate's most consequential opportunity to help steer the course of defense and security policy. It is our chance to lay out our priorities for keeping America safe.

For the past 60 years, without exception, Senate majorities have done the job and passed this crucial bill on a bipartisan vote, but, this year, our Democratic majority is sleepwalking toward yet another preventable problem.

The process began with earnest deliberation among our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee. Chairman REED and Ranking Member INHOFE presided over extensive discussions. They adopted 143 bipartisan amendments, and the committee reported out a final bill by a margin of 23 to 3.

Our colleagues began a process that should end with broad support for clear, bipartisan priorities, like equipping us to keep up with China's military modernization and combat a new generation of terrorist threats, but the Democratic leader has left the NDAA trapped in limbo while Democrats toy with another reckless taxing-and-spending spree.

Neglecting the NDAA denies our Armed Forces the certainty they need, and it denies the Senate a debate about the most consequential national security issues. This is especially misguided in light of the Biden administration's erratic, rudderless approach to foreign policy.