

longest surviving democracy in history. The American people are watching and the world is watching what we do. Americans expect us to vote yes or no, not hide behind procedure.

Restoring and updating the Voting Rights Act on a bipartisan basis is how we have always done it. The core provisions of the Voting Rights Act have been reauthorized five times. Every time, there has been overwhelming bipartisan support, Republicans and Democrats alike.

Presidents Nixon, Reagan, and George W. Bush all signed Voting Rights Act reauthorizations into law. They touted the profound importance of this landmark law for our democracy. In fact, I remember—I was here—the most recent Voting Rights Act reauthorization in 2006 and the vote: 98 to 0. We still have Senators serving today, both Republicans and Democrats, who voted to support that legislation. The compromise bill I crafted with Senator MURKOWSKI follows the very same blueprint of these other bipartisan efforts to restore the Voting Rights Act.

I am aware of the toxic partisanship of American politics today, but I hope that is not going to obscure what has for decades united us as Americans and across party lines, and that is the belief that every one of us should have that protecting our right to vote—the very right that gives our democracy its name—is bigger than party or politics. It is the belief that a system of self-government—a government of, by, and for the people—is one that is worth preserving for generations to come. It is the belief that government exists to serve the will of the people, not the other way around.

So I hope that today we are going to rise above partisanship. Let's do what is right for our democracy. Let's not be afraid to vote. I hope we show Americans the Senate is still capable of being the conscience of the Nation and a unifying force during a divided time. I still believe we can be the Senate that acts together to maintain Americans'—our constituents'—constitutional right to vote.

When Senators come to the floor to cast their votes today, I hope they keep in mind the rich bipartisan history of the Voting Rights Act. I hope they decide to live up to that history. I hope they are also mindful of how history will remember us. Decades from now, when history tells the story of today's current threats to democracy, let it also tell the story of Senators who rose above the fray to protect the right that gives democracy its very name. Let all Senators vote so that all Americans can vote.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

BUILD BACK BETTER AGENDA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday, Democrats continued making great progress toward finalizing President Biden's Build Back Better plan.

The challenges American families and workers are facing today are enormous, and President Biden's agenda is the remedy to much of their hardships. It is just what the American people want and what they need, and it is exactly why we need to focus on getting the job done to finalize and pass this legislation and deliver help for the American people.

Last night, I held another round of talks going past midnight with a number of my colleagues as we approach final agreement—talks with the White House, the Speaker, my Senate colleagues and chairs, and Members of the House. We continue to make very good progress each day. Passing such transformative legislation is not easy, but the long hours we are putting into it will be well worth it for the American people.

Over the last 24 hours, the hard work has yielded important new development. Yesterday, I announced the Democrats had reached an agreement to include provisions in Build Back Better that will lower prescription drug prices for seniors and for American families. This is a big deal.

For years, skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs have plagued millions of seniors and American families to the point that Americans spend far more on prescription drugs per capita than other wealthy nations. It is one of the largest out-of-pocket medical expenses that families have and it has gotten worse over the last few years.

For too many Americans, all it takes is a sudden serious illness and you can find yourself spending hundreds, if not thousands, and several thousands of dollars per year just to afford things like insulin or vitally needed cancer treatments. It is profoundly unfair and wholly un-American.

Imagine the strain you can face if someone—you or a loved one—is ill and you can't afford the medicine. You see them, their condition getting worse and worse. I can't think of things that are worse than that, though I guess there may be a few.

Yesterday, we took a large step forward in helping alleviate that problem. For the first time ever, Medicare will be empowered to directly negotiate prices in Part B and Part D. This will directly reduce out-of-pocket drug spending for millions of patients every time they visit a pharmacy or a doctor.

Our agreement does other things as well. It will cap out-of-pocket spending at \$2,000 per year, ending the dilemma I just spoke about, where a life-changing diagnosis could mean thousands upon thousands of dollars in new expenses that an individual can't afford.

This agreement will lower insulin prices so that Americans with diabetes don't pay more than \$35 per month for their insulin. Let me repeat that because it is amazing how the cost of insulin used to be so reasonable, then skyrocketed over the last few years with very little reasonable, justifiable explanation. This agreement will lower insulin prices so that Americans with diabetes don't pay more than \$35 per month for their insulin.

And it will reform the pharmaceutical industry to stop price gouging and make sure our country's drug pricing system benefits patients, not corporations.

It is not everything all of us wanted, but it is a major, major step in the right direction as we work to help the American people afford their better prescription drugs. We are going to keep working to make it even better, but this is a really good start and a major, major announcement.

I want to thank all my colleagues who had a hand in putting this agreement together: Senator WYDEN, Senator KLOBUCHAR, Senator MURPHY, Senator CORTEZ MASTO, Senator BENNET, and Senator KELLY. I also want to sincerely thank Senator SINEMA for working with us to reach this agreement.

We are going to build on this success as we continue making progress on the rest of Build Back Better. We are close. We are determined. We are confident that we will succeed in rewarding the trust that the American people have placed in us.

VOTING RIGHTS

Now on voting rights. Shortly before his death, the great John Lewis offered the American people a parting message: When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we call the Beloved Community.

The words of the great late John Lewis.

Well, today, the Senate is being called to take action because, across our beloved democracy, something indeed is not right. Something malicious is afoot. A lie—a terrible lie—spread by the former President of the United States is eating away corrosively at the foundation of our democracy, of our democratic heritage, like a disease.

This lie has led to the greatest coordinated effort at the State level to suppress voting rights since the era of segregation. In States like Georgia and Texas, Iowa and Florida and Arizona and many others, partisans have rewritten the rules of our elections in broad daylight, potentially making it harder for tens of millions of young, minority, low-income, disabled, and generally Democratic-leaning voters from participating in elections.

Today, the Senate will have a chance to respond to these attacks by voting to simply begin consideration—simply begin consideration—of the John Lewis

Voting Rights Advancement Act. It is a commonsense proposal to reinstate the preclearance provisions of the Voting Rights Act which were wrongfully struck down by a conservative Supreme Court and which have a long history of bipartisan support in the Senate.

I want to thank my colleague Senator LEAHY, who spoke earlier today, and Chairman DURBIN and all of my other Democratic colleagues who had a hand in drafting this proposal, and a special thanks to our colleague, the Senator from Alaska, who announced yesterday that she will vote in favor of opening debate on the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act. I know it was not a decision she made lightly—she called me from Alaska and let me know—but my Democratic colleagues worked hard with her to compromise on a proposal that she could support while still maintaining the basic thrust of their legislation.

Now, just as Democrats in the Senate worked with Senator MURKOWSKI on legislation to strengthen our democracy, we will work with other Republicans in good faith to improve this legislation, but they must come to the table first. I want to emphasize once again what today's vote is about. We are not asking any Republican to support specific legislation. Today is about whether or not we will vote to begin debate here in this Chamber.

Again, the preclearance provisions that are being updated in today's bill have long been supported by both sides of the aisle repeatedly. The Voting Rights Act, which originally instituted them, has been updated five times in the last half century, under both Republican and Democratic Presidents, and with votes from both sides. This has always been a bipartisan issue in the past; it should be no different today.

I commit to my Republican colleagues that we will have a full-fledged debate process here on the floor, where our colleagues can offer germane amendments and voice what concerns they may have.

Now, I hope more Members on the other side of the aisle will follow Senator MURKOWSKI's example. Senate Republicans shouldn't be afraid of merely starting debate on an issue we have long debated and long supported in the past. Merely crossing arms and squelching any opportunity for progress is unacceptable. If Republicans have different ideas on how to achieve a stronger democracy, they owe it to the American people to come forward and debate their ideas. I hope they do the right thing and vote for cloture to move forward on this discussion later today.

NOMINATION OF DILAWAR SYED

Mr. President, finally, Mr. Syed. For every executive branch nominee who grabs headlines, there are many, many more who escape the spotlight while still playing an essential role in our government. Almost always, these

nominees proceed through this Chamber with bipartisan support, but, today, a handful of extreme Republican Senators are needlessly and callously stonewalling many of President Biden's uncontroversial nominees. The case of Dilawar Syed—nominated to be second in charge at the SBA—stands out as being particularly, particularly egregious.

He is an American success story. He came to this country from Pakistan decades ago and became a successful entrepreneur, small business owner, and coalition builder. His nomination is backed by more than 200 civic, government, higher education, and business groups and leaders, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce—hardly a mouthpiece for the Biden administration. Upon his confirmation, Mr. Syed would be the highest ranking Muslim in government, the highest ranking Muslim for Senate confirmation.

But, for reasons that confound common sense, a handful of Republicans on the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee are not just blocking Mr. Syed's vote; they are refusing to meet in order to allow his nomination to proceed. They are just not even meeting, and that holds his nomination up. I haven't heard of that happening in a very long time.

To date, what is so confounding is that these Republicans who are holding Mr. Syed up have failed to offer a clear reason why they oppose him. Each time they try to come up with an explanation, whether it is cheap ad hominem attacks or partisan tie-ins to the culture wars, their arguments fall flat and are easily refuted.

Why are these handful of Republicans opposing this nomination?

Although Republicans have boycotted his markup several times, they will have a chance to give this man his vote tomorrow. Chairman CARDIN has worked with Republicans to try to get them to show up to tomorrow's markup. I commend Chairman CARDIN's effort.

Today, I ask: Will any Republicans have the decency to show up tomorrow to his markup and give Mr. Syed a vote?

If they want to oppose him, they are free to go on record and explain why, but boycotting his markup, resorting to cheap and offensive attacks, and needlessly blocking a qualified public servant is a shameful, shameful course to take.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

REMEMBERING JEAN ROUNDS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, we learned of the tragic passing

of a much loved member of the Senate family.

Jean Rounds was an impressive and active public servant who served the people of South Dakota in many ways, including as their first lady; who served a large and tight-knit family as mother and grandmother; and who, for our colleague, Senator MIKE ROUNDS, was, quite simply, the center of his world.

The life MIKE and Jean built together was a partnership founded on faith, service, and love. By all accounts, Jean's bravery, MIKE's devotion, and the loving care of their family in the face of a terrible illness made their inspiring example shine even brighter.

So the Senate is united in our grief. We will continue to hold our friend MIKE and the entire Rounds family close in our thoughts and prayers in the difficult days that lie ahead.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, on a totally different matter, last night was a difficult evening for Democrats. The Democratic Party has wildly misread their mandate and let the radical left run the country. Local Democrats let teachers unions keep schools shut months longer than necessary and told parents they didn't get a say in what their kids were learning. Washington Democrats have supercharged inflation, recreated welfare without work requirements, and made America significantly less energy independent.

President Biden was only given a 50-50 Senate and a tiny majority in the House, but he decided to let the radical left run the country. Citizens wanted a return to normalcy but have gotten a never-ending series of government-created crises.

So, look, the American people will not stand for this. That is what voters told Democrats last night all across the country. The results from different parts of our country demonstrate that this was, in large part, a referendum on national issues. But it is not too late. Democrats should listen to the voters, drop this reckless taxing-and-spending spree, and stop trying to ram through a socialist transformation that the American people never asked for.

The radical transformation that Democrats are writing behind closed doors would compound every mistake their party has made. Look at virtually any part of American families' lives, and Democrats' reckless taxing-and-spending spree would seize control of it and yank it way to the left.

The same Democrats who don't want parents involved in schools want to take over daycare and pre-K, crowd out faith-based and family providers, and put this vast new system under the control of the culture warrior HHS Secretary, who sued the Little Sisters of the Poor.

The same Democrats who pretend to defend working families are dead set on a massive tax cut that would overwhelmingly benefit rich people in blue States. One of the biggest pieces of