

from a Texas county commissioner after one particularly terrible accident in West Texas. He said: "Being a Texan doesn't describe where you're from; it describes who your family is."

Well, I am grateful to those countless Texans who supported our communities across our State during this crisis. First responders and 9/11 dispatchers have gone above and beyond the call of duty. Healthcare workers, fighting a pandemic already, have now had to deal with power outages, staffing shortages, and water disruptions because of the storm. Utility workers and energy providers have worked, of course, around the clock in dangerous conditions to restore power and safe drinking water to Texans. And millions of unsung heroes have helped their fellow Texans get through these dark days: checking on an elderly neighbor, helping drivers whose vehicles were stuck in the snow, welcoming people into their homes, donating supplies to those in need, and so much more.

I would like to offer a special thank-you to members of my staff in Texas who continued working throughout this crisis while battling power and water outages themselves. Because of their diligence, my office has connected Texans in need with local resources to provide shelter, food, and water. We have stayed in contact with State and local emergency officials about the ongoing crisis, and we have assisted local critical care facilities in need, including a large COVID testing lab in Austin. We helped connect it with local resources to receive additional fuel for its generators so millions of dollars of COVID testing materials and pathology tests would not go to waste.

The past year has dealt us a tough hand. I would say that is true for America. But I have faith that we will come through this crisis just as we always have before—together. I continue to say a prayer for those impacted by the storm and assure my constituents, my friends and neighbors in Texas, that I will continue to do everything in my power to help our State recover and rebuild.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on another matter, the Senate will continue to evaluate President Biden's nominees for critical positions throughout the Federal Government. Yesterday and today the Senate Judiciary Committee, on which I am privileged to serve, heard from Judge Merrick Garland and others who have testified in connection with his nomination. Of course, Judge Garland has been nominated to serve as the next Attorney General.

I have said before publicly that Judge Garland is highly qualified for the job. He is a widely respected judge with the right experience and credentials and the right temperament to lead the Department and manage its many critical missions. I was struck by Judge Garland's humility and his humanity. I believe he is a good man and a good person for this job.

But I have to say that I am under no illusion that he is going to be able to stop the policies of this administration, some of which I am not going to agree with, some of which I will fight and try to oppose.

I am encouraged by Judge Garland's pledge to keep politics out of the Justice Department, which is a significant improvement over the past. I know our Democratic colleagues like to act like all of the concerns that we had about the Justice Department were just during the Trump administration, and so I did have to remind them that the Obama administration Justice Department had a few problems of their own.

Nevertheless, Judge Garland, while we don't agree on everything—and it is true of other nominees of the President that I have supported—I don't think that is the standard by which I should provide my consent as a Senator. But I do believe he has the right experience and character to serve.

Unfortunately I can't offer that sort of full-throated, enthusiastic support for the President's nominee to lead the Office of Management and Budget. The announcement of Neera Tanden's nomination managed to do something increasingly rare these days, and that is to put conservatives and progressives on the same side of the argument.

Ms. Tanden has repeatedly made combative, insulting, and flat-out false statements against both Democrats and Republicans. She has referred to Republicans as "evil" and "monsters." She has villainized Leader MCCONNELL and called Senator COTTON a "fraud" and Senator COLLINS "the worst." She has gone toe-to-toe with Senator BERNIE SANDERS, who accused her and her progressive organization of "maligning [his] staff and supporters and belittling progressive ideas."

She has even peddled a completely false conspiracy theory that Russian hackers changed votes in 2016 to help President Trump. In short, Ms. Tanden has consistently made comments that stand in stark contrast to the Biden administration's top goals of promoting the facts and unifying our country.

Last Friday, the Senator from West Virginia, Senator MANCHIN, announced he will not support Ms. Tanden's nomination because of her inflammatory rhetoric that would, he said, have a "toxic and detrimental impact" on Congress's relationship with the Office of Management and Budget. Yesterday, Senator COLLINS, who is known for working across party lines, said she won't support this toxic nomination.

I agree with our friends from West Virginia and Maine, and I think these announcements create a nearly impossible path to confirmation for this nominee. In order to be confirmed, she would need the support of at least one Republican Senator—and more, if there are additional Democrats who share the views of Senator MANCHIN.

Based on her well-documented history of divisive and misleading com-

ments, I think this nominee faces long odds, to say the least. My friendly advice to President Biden is to withdraw Neera Tanden's nomination and select someone who, at the very least, has not promoted wild conspiracy theories and openly bashed people on both sides of the aisle that she happens to disagree with.

If President Biden is truly interested in unifying our country, I would expect him to select an OMB nominee with mainstream views and a proven ability to work respectfully with those who have different views from his or hers.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, "More deaths in 2020 than in any year in over a decade." That is what the Chicago Sun-Times headline read last week. But this wasn't a story about the coronavirus. It was an article about suicide. There were more suicides by Black residents of Cook County, IL, in 2020 than over the past 10 years. All told, 437 of our neighbors in Cook County took their lives.

At the same time, more than 600 Cook County residents died from opioid overdoses between January and June 2020 alone—double the number from a year earlier.

While the human suffering of COVID-19 has captured our attention, as it should, two other deadly epidemics in America still rage on: opioids and the mental health crises.

Even before the virus took its toll, we had been in the midst of the worst drug overdose crisis in our Nation's history, and we are witnessing skyrocketing rates of suicide. But COVID-19 has deepened these epidemics, which sadly feed on isolation and despair.

With the convergence of coronavirus emergencies, we are failing those most vulnerable to addiction and mental health challenges. And like the coronavirus, mental health challenges and addiction can occur with any one of us in any family, in any neighborhood.

Earlier this month, the New York Times profiled three American mothers on the brink of chaos and crisis. The story chronicled the relentless stress and burdens of working mothers over 11 months of this panic—struggling to balance remote learning duties for their kids, keeping their families safe and healthy, keeping food on the table, paying the bills, and knowing that every morning they have to get up and do it all over again that day and the next day, with no end in sight.

One of the mothers described the struggle this way. She said:

We are holding together with the same tape that we have been using since March. The tape is barely working, but we are still here.

She speaks for millions of mothers. Experts and advocates warn that COVID-19 has created a perfect storm for a surge in mental health and addiction. Isolation, fear, grief, financial hardship all come together and can feel overwhelming.

At the same time, the pandemic has made it more difficult for many to connect with lifesaving care and social services. Peer recovery meetings have moved to Zoom; routine human connections have been lost; and treatment access restricted. It is trauma on the brain and body, and it fuels the alarming spikes in addiction, overdose, and suicide.

Last week, I spoke with advocates from the Illinois Society of Addiction Medicine and a group called Live4Lali, a community organization focusing on recovery and harm reduction. These community leaders provide lifesaving care through recovery programs, street medicine, handing out fentanyl test strips, and distributing the overdose reversal drug naloxone.

The statistics they shared with me on Chicago-area opioid overdose deaths during this pandemic are devastating. In the last year, opioid deaths have soared: 23 percent in Lake County, 37 percent in DuPage County, and a staggering 64 percent in McHenry County.

Every morning, we look at the posting on CNN of the deaths in America from the coronavirus. Heartbreaking. Over a half a million people dead. But we are not posting the increase in deaths from opioids during the same periods of time.

Addiction is an equal opportunity killer. But like COVID, the opioid epidemic strikes communities of color with a disproportionate ferocity. In Chicago, Black residents are dying from overdoses at seven times the rate of White residents.

Let me tell you about one person who sought help from Live4Lali, a woman named Tonya, who recently moved to Lake County. When the pandemic hit, the recovery meetings for her substance abuse disorder shifted to Zoom, and the weight of the challenge left Tonya to struggle. She knew her recovery was in danger.

For days, she called for treatment programs, but no beds were available. Desperate, she called 9-1-1 emergency care at a hospital. Tonya was evaluated and sent home. Feeling hopeless and ashamed, she decided to take all of the pills in her mother's bottle of blood thinner medication. She was taken unconscious back to the hospital and pronounced dead.

Too many like Tonya are being left alone in their darkest hours. And it is not just in the Chicagoland area. According to the CDC, emergency room visits for suicides and overdoses spiked nationally once the pandemic gripped our Nation. By May, the country had

experienced its largest 1-month spike in overdose deaths.

A new survey conducted by the CDC also found that one in four young adults had considered suicide in the past month—one in four. This should set off alarm bells in every direction.

There is no vaccine against despair and addiction, but there are programs and treatments and strategies. We must give communities and healthcare providers the support they need now more than ever.

The American Rescue Plan proposed by President Biden provides those resources. The House is expected to vote on the President's plan this week. The Senate has to show the same sense of commitment and urgency.

The American Rescue Plan includes nearly \$4 billion in addiction and mental health treatments for healthcare providers. It has \$7.6 billion for Community Health Centers to address behavioral health disparities.

It includes a plan that I crafted with Senator RUBIO to increase the availability of healthcare, including behavioral health treatment, by providing scholarship and loan repayment awards to build the pipeline of health professionals who agree to serve in needy areas.

Special efforts were made to recruit more people of color into these healing professions, which can help tackle disparities. The President's Rescue Plan also expands health insurance coverage through the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid. This money will save lives.

America has arrived at the heartbreaking milestone: half a million COVID deaths. As we work to expand vaccinations and end COVID-19, we cannot ignore the lethal epidemics of addiction and suicide, which are soaring in the cold shadows of this pandemic.

Every day we wait, more people, in every ZIP code in America, struggle. More families grieve. More lives are lost. We need to get help to the people who need it now.

Mr. President, you and I are veterans of Congress. We have been doing this for a few years. Some things happen that give you hope. A year ago, we passed the CARES Act. It was nothing short of amazing, but we did it at a moment of real fear. We just saw this pandemic starting to rise. We saw businesses starting to close. We moved quickly, decisively, with the biggest spending bill in the history of the United States, more than \$2 trillion for the CARES Act. And it passed this Senate, in this hopelessly politically divided America, by a vote of 96 to 0—the CARES Act.

Well, it took us a while to come back with a reprise or an answer to what happened after it passed. The pandemic raged through America. The economy floundered. Millions were unemployed. And in December, just a few short weeks ago, we passed the second bill, the December relief bill, \$900 billion, a sizable investment. And we character-

ized it as an emergency response, a special response, a temporary fix to go into the system and pay for unemployment benefits and many other things—\$900 billion, a substantial sum of money. And it passed here with 92 affirmative votes: 96 on the first, 92 on the second. Still, amazing rollcalls in a politically divided Chamber like the U.S. Senate.

Then came the new President. I won't put in all the other chapters that occurred that seemed like an endless novel, but it was serious. But this President came in—President Biden came in and faced the reality of what we have in America today. Last night, he did it as well. He and the First Lady, as well as Vice President HARRIS and the First Gentleman, stood in silent prayer for the half million Americans we have lost. Not ignoring the problem but facing the problem, President Biden said: Come together, America, unite, and let's, with common purpose, address this pandemic and the problems it has created.

It is a much different approach in his Presidency. To me, it is honest. It is refreshing. It is hopeful. But he has turned to this Congress and asked this Congress to pass the American Rescue Plan. It is a measure that costs \$1.9 trillion. It is huge. It has to be. Considering what we face in America, we need nothing less. Maybe we will not need to spend every penny. I hope we don't. But we better be prepared to pay for it if we are—money for more vaccine and distribution of that vaccine; money for cash payments to families who need a helping hand; money for unemployment benefits that are supposed to run out in just 2 short weeks, on March 14; money for rental assistance for people who are facing eviction; money for schools so that they can prepare the classrooms for teachers and students to return safely. The list goes on, and it is an important and valuable list and, as I mentioned, money for mental health treatment and addiction treatment that is still a very real challenge in America today.

The difference is this. In the CARES Act, with 96 to 0, and in the December bill, which we passed with 92 affirmative votes, those were under the Trump administration, and there was a strong bipartisan support of that legislation, as you can tell from the numbers. The rollcalls tell the story.

Now comes President Biden, asking for another rescue package for America, which is still languishing, fighting this pandemic. We don't hear the same calls for bipartisanship or at least we don't hear the same responses to the calls for bipartisanship. Why? What is different? The only thing different is we have a different President.

When it was a Republican President named Trump, Democrats, like myself and virtually all others, stood by and said: Let's do it together. We can disagree on everything under the Sun, but when it comes to this pandemic and what it is doing to America, we are

going to stand together, both political parties. But when President Biden makes the same proposal, we don't hear the chorus of support from across the aisle that we once did. That is disheartening to me.

The problem is real. Sure, there are ways any legislator could perhaps write the bill better, but let's get that done, and let's respond, as the President has called, with the resources America needs to get back on its feet. That is where we are today.

The House is going to pass their measure this week. And in the next couple of weeks, the Senate will get its chance. It is time for us to stand up and do something. The American people didn't send us here to squabble or to find reasons for differences but rather to come together in a bipartisan way and solve the problems facing this country.

The President believes, and I share that belief, that a united America with the resources can conquer this challenge as it has so many in the past. We can do that, but we need to do it by coming together.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BUDGET

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the \$1.9 trillion spending bill that is under consideration before this Congress.

As President Biden has said repeatedly, if you want to know someone's values, look at one's budget. Well, that is what we are doing, because I believe that President Biden is right. If the American people want to know the Democrats' values, all we need to do is look at the budget. The Democrats are making clear what they stand for. It seems that they are standing for teachers unions and job-crushing mandates on American businesses. The Republicans stand for ending the pandemic, for getting people back to work, and for getting kids back to school. The differences could not be more clear.

The Senate has debated the Democratic budget—we did it a couple of weeks ago—and we voted on many amendments. Every Senator had a chance to propose and make some changes to the budget that was brought forth. Every single Senator went on record on a number of amendments and items related to the budget for the United States of America. Now we know where we stand.

I introduced an amendment that had to do with energy production in my home State of Wyoming. Wyoming feels like we are being targeted by President Biden because of his ban on oil and gas exploration on public lands.

You know, those projects are a major source of jobs in my home State. They fund our schools, our roads, our bridges, our teachers, our students, and additional services for working families.

My amendment would provide funding for our public schools—schools that have been punished by this ban announced by President Biden. That amendment on this floor received 98 votes out of 100. It got the support of every single Democrat in the U.S. Senate, so I am grateful for my colleagues for that support of the amendment to protect our students and our schools and our teachers. Yet I have to say that by voting for my amendment, the 98 people in this body—specifically the Democrats—are admitting that there is a problem created by the actions of President Biden. They are admitting that President Biden's Executive order, signed on the day he was inaugurated, is hurting families all across the country.

So, to my Democratic colleagues, keep working with us to address the needs of the Nation. Stand up to these overreaching, radical proposals by the Biden administration. On issue after issue, that really has not yet happened.

Many of my Republican colleagues, on this side of the aisle, offered good ideas that the Democrats refused to support. Senator BLUNT introduced an amendment to reopen America's schools. Now, that is an idea that science has supported for months. Every Republican voted yes. Every Democrat voted no. I have yet to hear one of my Democratic colleagues make the case for keeping the schools closed; yet that is how they voted when it came to the budget. Just like President Biden, they are trying to have it both ways. They say they want the schools open; yet they don't do what needs to be done.

President Biden has claimed time and again he wants the schools open; yet his Chief of Staff says there is no money to reopen them. Well, that is absolutely wrong. Last year, President Trump signed into law \$68 billion for our schools, specifically tied to coronavirus relief. Only \$5 billion of that money has been spent. That leaves \$63 billion still available. In the Democrats' budget being proposed right now, almost all of the money for schools is not even for this year. Ninety-five percent of the money is for the years 2022 through 2028—after the coronavirus will be behind us.

The Democrats are still putting the teachers unions ahead of students. Joe Biden has surrendered to the teachers unions. They have written to him a ransom note, and he has been happy to pay it. Teachers are putting politics ahead of science, and so is this administration.

I joined with Senator SCOTT of South Carolina to introduce another amendment to the budget bill of the Democrats. It said that if we give money to States—and there is a lot of money in

this proposal to give money to States: New York, Illinois, California—that the States have to give the American people accurate data about the coronavirus and specifically in their nursing homes. People want to know the answers about the coronavirus and the impact on nursing homes because there is a real problem there.

New York now admits that it gave the public false information. The numbers were not just wrong; they were nearly off by half. The Governor's top aide in New York said they were afraid of being investigated by Bill Barr's Justice Department. They were afraid that President Trump would make it a "political football."

Don't the people of New York have a right to know the truth about what is happening in the nursing homes in that State when people are losing parents and grandparents and when people with the coronavirus are being moved from the hospital back into those nursing homes to spread the disease to others?

The Governor of New York wanted to cover it up. People would agree it sounds like a coverup, so Senator SCOTT and I came to the floor and said that it was unacceptable, that States have to tell the truth. Every Republican voted yes. Every single Democrat voted no. Every Senate Democrat voted to protect Governor Cuomo instead of telling the truth to the American people.

During the budget debate, there were some good ideas that some Democrats supported. Yet, even then, in the wee hours of the morning, a number of the Democrats who had voted for those amendments flip-flopped on a later vote to head the other way. What they did is they had another amendment to strip out the amendments that had been put on.

For example, Senator YOUNG of Indiana had an amendment so that money in the bill would go to American citizens, not to illegal immigrants. Eight Democrats voted in agreement with that. They said you shouldn't be sending checks to illegal immigrants. A few hours later, they voted to strip it out. So every Democrat in the Senate is now on the record. Every Democrat in the Senate has voted in favor of taking people's hard-earned taxpayer dollars and giving it to people who are in the country illegally.

Senator DAINES brought up an amendment on a different topic. He said we should proceed with the Keystone Pipeline. Remember, President Biden, with an Executive order on the day he was inaugurated, stopped work on the Keystone Pipeline, resulting in the loss of hundreds and hundreds and likely thousands of jobs. Several Democrats voted and said we should reopen the pipeline. Let it go. Let it work. A few hours later, in the wee hours of the morning, they reversed themselves and voted to strip it out.

Senator BRAUN of Indiana introduced an amendment to prevent President Biden from banning fracking. Now, this