

top adviser to President Obama. His estimate is that it is double that number. He said there have been \$4,000 more in expenses for the American families this year than there was last year.

Of course, the biggest increase that we see is in energy. Gas prices are up. They are up by more than a dollar a gallon. Now, this is just in the 10 months since Joe Biden took office. It costs \$20 to \$30 more to fill the tank. Today, they are at a 7-year high.

Natural gas prices are also at a 7-year high, while half the families in America heat their homes with natural gas. One in five American families has already been cutting expenses in other places to pay for their energy bill for the year.

Last month was the biggest jump in energy prices, amazingly, in an entire decade, and winter is almost here. Some people may have to choose between whether they can afford to eat or whether they can afford to heat their homes.

It is hard to believe that in just 10 full months in the White House, Joe Biden could have taken inflation to this very high level.

The supply chain crisis, the worker shortage, the inflation crisis are all the direct results of the policies of the Biden administration and the Democrats in Washington.

Why are the shelves empty? Well, because we don't have enough workers. More than 11 million jobs today are unfilled. We have broken new records for unfilled jobs in 5 of the first 10 months that Joe Biden has been in office. And no matter where you go, there are "help wanted" signs in the windows.

This is no coincidence. In March, President Biden extended a bonus payment to people who stayed home from work. Millions of people made more money by not going to work than they would by going to work. Well, in September, that bonus payment ran out.

Then Joe Biden announced a nationwide vaccine mandate on the American people. This mandate took a sledge hammer to our Nation's workforce. The President must have known that people would lose their jobs. It seems he didn't care because he imposed the mandate anyway.

These are people who worked every day during the pandemic, showing up no matter the weather, no matter the situation. They showed up to do the job to help the people in their communities and in their States and in this country.

Now, under Joe Biden, people are losing their jobs, shelves are empty, prices continue to rise.

In March, Democrats made things worse by putting \$2 trillion on the Nation's credit card. That bill sent inflation into overdrive.

The San Francisco Federal Reserve says the Democrats' spending increased inflation.

Democrats made lavish promises about their last spending bill. They said the bill would create millions of

jobs. NANCY PELOSI said 4 million jobs. Joe Biden upped the ante and said 7 million new jobs.

How did the predictions turn out? Not so well for the predictions of NANCY PELOSI or Joe Biden. Joe Biden was off by the full 7 million jobs.

The most recent jobs report shows we created fewer jobs than were predicted even without the Democrats' spending bill. Those 7 million jobs Joe promised are nowhere to be found.

Last month, we created less than half the number of jobs the experts predicted.

Now Democrats want to do the same thing all over again. They want another multitrillion-dollar spending spree. This spending spree would cause the largest tax increase in half a century, trillions more in debt, and even higher prices.

Speaking of rising prices, the price of this spending bill keeps going up. For months, Democrats claimed that they wouldn't add to the debt. Then they said the total bill would cost less than \$2 trillion.

Last Friday, we found out the real price tag. The Congressional Budget Office took all the accounting gimmicks, the budgets tricks—took it all out of the bill—and they told us that the real cost of the bill is nearly triple the price that the Democrats said.

The real pricetag is close to \$5 trillion. It would be the largest spending bill in history. The Democrats' spending spree would add \$3 trillion to the national debt.

And, just yesterday, the Democrats voted—every Democrat voted—to raise the debt ceiling in the United States by \$2.5 trillion. Every Republican voted against it.

If you think about how much money this is, it is almost the size of the entire economy of the United Kingdom.

You know, all of this spending would bring the Democrats' total to \$5 trillion in new debt in just 10 months.

And what does all of this spending get you?

Well, the most expensive thing in the bill is something that some refer to as the Green New Deal, which is billions of dollars in new taxes on America's natural gas production. It includes an army of climate activists paid to protest American energy projects.

The second most expensive part of the bill is the blue State billionaire bailout. It is a tax break for people in high-tax States. I look at it as specifically California, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey. The vast majority of Americans would get no tax break at all. Almost all of that benefit would go to the wealthy.

Don't take my word for it. Here is what the Democrat chairman of the Budget Committee, the junior Senator from Vermont, had to say about it.

He said:

The last thing we should be doing is giving more tax breaks to the very rich. It sends a terrible, terrible message.

But that is what the Democrats in the House under NANCY PELOSI passed

and sent to the Senate for consideration and passage.

The junior Senator from Vermont, the chairman of the Budget Committee, also said: "The hypocrisy is too strong."

Well, the chairman is absolutely right. Even by the standards of Democrats in Washington, this hypocrisy is too strong.

If Democrats pass this bill, it will mean tax cuts for billionaires and tax audits for working families. It will mean higher taxes, more debt, higher prices, the highest inflation in 40 years, and it will go even higher.

When the American people ask themselves, "Are we better off today than we were a year ago?" we know what the answer is going to be: a resounding no. If Democrats pass this bill, it will be no for years and years to come.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

(Ms. SMITH assumed the Chair.)

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

KENTUCKY

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I see my colleague from Kentucky on the floor, and I want to take this opportunity to express to him and to Senator MCCONNELL my condolences for what the people of Kentucky have endured with this catastrophic devastation. I know he has been a strong advocate for his State, and I fully support a swift, strong Federal response to alleviating the suffering and assisting in rebuilding. In times of tragedy, our Nation comes together to support all who are in this kind of need.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 5323

Mr. President, I also express my strong support—and it is the reason I am here—for \$1 billion of supplemental security assistance to replenish Israel's Iron Dome Supplemental Appropriations Act. The Senate must pass H.R. 5323 as quickly as possible. The Iron Dome has widespread, bipartisan support in Congress—as well it should. It has the administration's support, which it richly deserves.

During the May 2021 conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Iron Dome defense system intercepted about 90 percent of the missiles that were targeting populated civilians in Israel. In total, 4,400 rockets were launched by Hamas. If the Iron Dome had failed, countless Israeli civilians would have been killed. The system performed exceptionally well, and it showed its necessity for both humanitarian and strategic defensive purposes.

I am very concerned that one of my colleagues previously blocked the passage of this bill in the Senate. I hope provisions of this year's Defense Authorization Act, specifically sections

1213 and 1214 and section 9021 of last year's Defense appropriations bill, assuage any ongoing concern about transferring funds to the Taliban. No funds—none—zero—will be used to help or support or enable, in any way, the Taliban. Funds previously appropriated for the Afghanistan National Security Forces are deeply needed to terminate contracts that are already in place. These funds will not go to the Taliban but to those who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

If any Pentagon employee breaks the law—if any one of them makes funds available to the Taliban—that individual could and should face criminal penalties, including jail time under the Antideficiency Act. We cannot continue to use the U.S.-Israeli relationship as a political football. It is against our own strategic interests; it violates our humanitarian values; and it is a security problem.

I am a strong, strong supporter of Israel, but I often say that friends can disagree, and friends can criticize each other. I have been critical at times of my friends in the Israeli Government. I am standing again on the floor of the U.S. Senate, being, arguably, critical of one of my colleagues, and I ask: Where are my colleagues across the aisle when one of their own Members is actively impeding Israel's ability to defend itself from Hamas? It is a cause they say they support. Where is their concern? Where is the outrage?

I urge all of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this critical funding.

So, Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, following consultation with the Republican leader, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 140, H.R. 5323; that there be up to 2 hours of debate; and that upon the use or yielding back of time, the bill be considered read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I have consistently opposed spending outside of the budget unless it is offset by spending cuts elsewhere. It is not only an opinion I hold, it is actually the law. It is called pay as you go.

We passed the law many years ago—more than a decade ago—to try to balance our books by having people come forward with things that sound good, want to spend it but not offset it by spending cuts elsewhere.

There is no question that the United States has been a very good ally of Israel. Over time, probably funds exceeding \$80 to \$100 billion have been expended to Israel over the last four decades. Just on missile defense, the

United States has given Israel \$7 billion: \$1.6 billion for Iron Dome, \$2 billion for David's Sling, and \$3.7 billion for Arrow. In fact, the NDAA that just passed this week gives them another \$100 million for this.

I am not disputing whether or not the extra billion dollars would help them. I will vote for the extra billion dollars, and that is what I will propose today. But it should be offset with spending cuts elsewhere.

There is a \$3 billion fund that is left over from money we were giving to the Afghan national government. There is no Afghan national government. There is a bunch of hoodlums, the Taliban, who have taken over.

I asked Secretary Blinken: Can you assure me you are not going to give these funds to the Taliban?

He says: It depends on how they behave.

So it isn't so certain that this money is not going to go to the Taliban. The current law may say future money goes, but this old money, and we don't want it going to the Taliban. We think it should be better spent.

It is money that can be reclaimed. Why wouldn't it be a good thing to take money that might go to our enemy and actually give it to our ally? It makes perfect sense. Why would we be so obstinate that we are unwilling to take a pay-for? It is a pay-for that is sitting there waiting for us to use.

Three billion dollars is supposed to be given to the Afghan national government. It no longer exists. Let's take a billion of that, let's give it for Iron Dome; let's give \$2 billion back to the Treasury. It sounds like a win-win-win all around.

Why can't we, for once in our lives, spend money on something good and take away money from something where we shouldn't be spending it? This money was never intended to go to anything but the Afghan national government. They don't exist anymore. We should reclaim that money, spend a billion on the Iron Dome, and put \$2 billion back in the Treasury. It might be the first time in decades that we actually did something fiscally responsible around here. But that is a problem. I don't understand why we can't do it.

So I would—rather than just give another billion dollars out of the Treasury that actually makes us weaker, makes us more in debt, let's offset it by taking money that is in a fund for an entity that no longer exists.

So, Mr. President, I, therefore, ask the Senator to modify his request so that instead of his proposal, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 140, H.R. 5323; further, that the only amendment in order be my substitute amendment, which is at the desk. I further ask that there be 2 hours of debate, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; and that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Paul substitute amendment at the desk be

considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator so modify his request?

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, my colleague from Kentucky talks about money as though it were going to go to the Taliban, as if it were going to an entity that no longer exists. In fact, that money is necessary to terminate contracts, to fulfill obligations, not only under the contracts but to our allies, the Afghan at-risk allies who sought to fulfill our mission. We have a moral imperative, and we have, arguably, a legal obligation.

That money is not just sitting there. It is not fungible. But put aside the merits of that argument, we have also a moral and strategic interest to our ally Israel to replenish its defenses at a time when it depends on our assistance to defend itself, to provide that Iron Dome that saves lives of innocent civilians who otherwise would have perished as a result of those 4,400 rockets launched by Hamas and possibly led to escalating contention and conflict in that region.

So it is a win-win, in fact, for us to replenish the Iron Dome without conditioning it in any way on other funds. Therefore, I will not modify my request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection to the modification is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, I think it is very important that the American people know and those who support Israel know that we can get this done today. We can get a billion dollars additional, in addition to the \$100 million, in addition to the \$7 billion we have already given to Israel, in addition to the \$80 to \$100 billion we have given to them over the decades—we can do an extra billion today. All I am asking is that it is paid for.

The objections coming from Democrats is that they are unwilling to pay for the Iron Dome spending so, in reality, the funding won't happen today because of Democrat opposition to Iron Dome being paid for. It can happen right now. All you got to do is agree to take money from a defunct fund to a defunct entity. Three billion dollars is in a fund to an entity that no longer exists. The Afghan national government no longer exists. This is such an easy pay-for. This one is dangling low fruit that we can pay for. You can get exactly what we want to do, that is a billion dollars extra, in addition to the money we already have given Israel for Iron Dome, but pay for it. That is a responsible way. So I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, if I may just finish.

We are here again. I will come back again to the floor to seek this Iron Dome money.

Many of us are absolutely determined that the United States fulfill this moral, humanitarian, and foreign policy obligation. It is in our strategic interest.

This obligation is paid for; it is not debt; and it will incur no obligations that are unpaid for. So I regret that my colleague, again, has blocked this from proceeding.

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

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

NOMINATION OF MARIA L. PAGAN

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in a few minutes, I will be putting forward a unanimous consent request asking the Senate to take up and approve a highly qualified and noncontroversial nominee.

I will just take a couple of minutes to talk about Maria Pagan, nominated to be the next Deputy U.S. Trade Representative in Geneva. There are a few key points to make about the nominee, as well as the critical role she will serve representing the United States at the World Trade Organization to get a better deal for American workers, farmers, and businesses.

To start, Ms. Pagan isn't new to high-pressure, high-profile negotiations. She is currently deputy general counsel at the U.S. Trade Representative's Office, the person called in when issues are particularly challenging. She has taken on these difficult issues during numerous trade agreement negotiations, including the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. She was in lockstep with Members of Congress who pushed hard to guarantee that the commitments laid out in the USMCA were fully and quickly enforceable, a key priority for protecting American jobs.

She has been a longtime public servant, spending 30 years in government. She has served both Republican and Democratic administrations at the Department of Commerce and at USTR. She is an expert on a host of issues from trade in services to government procurement, and she has litigated several disputes before the WTO.

She is highly qualified. She is a nominee who brings the two sides of the Senate together. The Finance Committee vote on her nomination was 27 to 1.

I would just say, at this point in time, that is about as good as it gets.

Colleagues, I have said before that it is crucial to get qualified people to the office representing the United States

around the world. It is important to have these skilled individuals working on behalf of our workers, our businesses, and our interests. This nomination is particularly important to me.

It is no secret that the World Trade Organization, which can be a valuable institution, is not today functioning as it needs to. The rules that underpin the WTO were crafted more than two decades ago. These 20th century rules have simply not kept up with 21st century technology.

Meanwhile, the Chinese Government has learned to game the system. It does so routinely at the expense of hard-working American families.

As a result, the process of leveling the playing field with trade rules based on fairness have been overtaken by the exploitation of loopholes and rip-offs. In many cases, that comes at the direct expense of American workers and American businesses.

With her decades of experience, Ms. Pagan understands these challenges as well as anyone. From day one after her confirmation, she will hit the ground running to lead our allies in fighting back.

For example, one area that I feel particularly strongly about is that new rules are desperately needed to deal with subsidized fisheries. Harmful subsidies are allowing fleets to reach distant shores of less developed countries like Ecuador and Ghana. They are stripping the ocean of fish without regard to species or regulations or basic decency. These highly subsidized, poorly regulated fleets rely on abhorrent labor practices—including forced labor. Worst of all, their catch ends up in American supermarkets and on American tables.

Oregon fishing families who trade in fairly and sustainably caught U.S. salmon, pollack, and other fish simply should not be asked to compete against that kind of horrendous cheating.

Negotiations on this issue have been dragging on for over 20 years, and I can tell you, the 20 years have not improved the situation for our oceans and for our families.

The 12th Ministerial Conference, which was delayed last week due to the new COVID variant, is another really important chance to get these negotiations finally done. The outcome has to be strong. It can't open, once again, harmful new loopholes.

These meetings have been rescheduled to the spring. The United States needs tough, smart leadership at the table. Ms. Pagan, with her years of negotiation, is just the closer, just the kind of person the United States needs.

There are no shortages of other issues that Ms. Pagan will have to tackle at the World Trade Organization, from institutional reform to dispute settlement, to e-commerce. The United States needs a leader who can work with our allies to get it all done. She is the right woman for the job.

Maria Pagan is a highly qualified, experienced nominee. She is a proven ne-

gotiator, a strong advocate for workers, farmers, and businesses. She comes, as I have indicated, with strong, 27-to-1, bipartisan support in the Senate Finance Committee. There is just no justification for any delay in moving this nomination forward.

I will have more to say when I ask unanimous consent, briefly, in a bit.

And, at this moment, 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. 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.

TRIBUTE TO DR. FRANCIS COLLINS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is a curious thing about tipping points in the quest for progress. Very often, the events that cleave history into "before" and "after" can seem insignificant when they happen. That might have been true 29 years ago, when the National Institutes of Health named a 42-year-old professor from the University of Michigan to direct one of NIH's newest cutting-edge institutes.

The professor's name was Francis Collins. The New York Times' account of his arrival ran 117 words.

His mission at NIH was to lead what we called then the Human Genome Project, an international quest to discover the genetic blueprint for human life. It was the scientific equivalent of the search for the Holy Grail. There were just as many skeptics as believers in that undertaking.

But less than 6 years later, in June 2000, the first mapping of the human genome was complete. Overnight, that obscure professor from Michigan, Francis Collins, became one of the most famous scientists in the world.

The decoding of the human genome was the achievement of a historic public-private partnership between the NIH's genome lab, headed by Dr. Collins and a private firm—a rival turned partner—founded by the genetic pioneer, Craig Venter. It involved hundreds of scientists from six nations. It remains one of the greatest advances in scientific knowledge in all of recorded history.

In a White House ceremony announcing the first sequencing of the human genome, Dr. Collins said he was humbled and awed by the discovery. In his words: "We have caught the first glimpses of our instruction book, previously known only to God."

Cracking the genetic code of human life has revolutionized science and medicine. It continues to yield profound medical discoveries all the time.

That historic discovery could have been the capstone of any career in science, but for Francis Collins, there was an amazing second act to follow.

In 2009, President Obama chose Francis Collins to lead the entire National Institutes of Health, the largest