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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, You have brought us to this season of great expectations as we prepare our hearts to welcome Your intervening in human affairs.

Lord, use our Senators to bring peace and unity to our Nation and world. Inspire them to embrace optimism as they serve You and humanity. Help them yield to the inflow of Your insight, vision, and guidance.

Lord, we also pray for the millions who live in constant deprivation: the homeless and hungry, the oppressed and persecuted. Teach us how to share our more than enough with those who rarely have enough.

We pray in Your loving Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Atul Atmaram Gawande, of Massachusetts, to be an Assistant Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

MOTION TO DISCHARGE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, pursuant to S. Res. 27, the Committee on the Judiciary being tied on the question of reporting, I move to discharge the Senate Committee on the Judiciary from further consideration of the nomination of Holly A. Thomas, of California, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit from the Committee on the Judiciary.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the provisions of S. Res. 27, there will now be up to 4 hours of debate on the motion, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, with no motions, points of order, or amendments in order.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

TRIBUTE TO JACK REED

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Madam President, I want to begin today with some celebrations.

Recently, our dear colleague and friend Senator JACK REED of Rhode Island cast his 8,000th vote as a Senator—a remarkable milestone for one of the most beloved and respected Members of this body.

A lifelong Rhode Islander, a graduate of West Point, and the dean of the Rhode Island congressional delegation, Senator REED is one of America's best examples of doing politics and public service the right way: no fuss, no nonsense—just results.

Over the years, he has been a mentor, a friend, and an invaluable resource for countless Members on both sides of the aisle. Few in this Chamber can match his expertise on matters of national defense, veterans affairs, and the military. I would also add that the same can be said about matching his attendance. Over the years, he has missed just 38 votes on his way to 8,000—good for an attendance percentage of 99.5 percent. Wow.

As the Senate has undergone change over the years, Senator REED has remained the same: focused on Rhode Island, focused on our country, focused on keeping this Chamber working on behalf of the American people. We are lucky to call Senator REED our colleague and friend.

And so congratulations, JACK, on this milestone, and here is to 8,000 more votes to come.

NOMINATIONS

Madam President, last night, I filed cloture on 22 of President Biden's nominees who, to date, have been pointlessly stalled by Republican obstruction—22. We are going to work until they are all confirmed by this Chamber, and we may need to add more.

In past years, many of these nominees would have sailed through with consent and cooperation, but, this

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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year, a handful of Republicans have hijacked the rules of the Senate to slow the process down. It is cynical; it is entirely pointless; and worst of all, it is damaging—seriously damaging—to our national security.

This is the consequence of Republican obstruction. We are going to work on getting these nominees confirmed as long as it takes, and we could be back here in the near future doing this whole thing over again.

For all the tortured logic we hear coming from the other side for why these nominations remain frozen, the fact is that my Republican colleagues who are holding these nominations up are deliberately making the American people less safe and making it harder for the administration to address the national security and economic challenges that face our Nation.

It is unacceptable, and we are going to work to confirm these important nominees.

VOTING RIGHTS

Now, on voting rights, Madam President, as we continue working to bring the Senate to a position where we can move forward on Build Back Better, Senate Democrats have spent the past few weeks engaged in a separate discussion on addressing another critical and urgent priority—protecting the right to vote and safeguarding our elections.

Yesterday, I joined with a number of my colleagues in detailed conversations about how the Senate will get voting rights done in time for the 2022 elections, including advancing the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act.

In State after State, Republican-led legislatures are approving the most draconian voter registration laws that we have seen since segregation, and they are doing it on an entirely partisan basis. Let me repeat that. Republicans at the State level are passing the most egregious restrictions on voting rights that we have seen since segregation, and they are doing it on an entirely partisan basis.

Senate Democrats are working to find a path forward to respond to these attacks by passing legislation like the Freedom to Vote Act and the Voting Rights Advancement Act. Part of that conversation involves finding ways to restore the Senate so it can, once again, work as it is supposed to, as it has worked for generations before the gridlock of the past decade or so.

These conversations are ongoing. The fight to protect voting rights is far from over in the Senate. Just because Republicans will not join us to defend democracy does not mean that Democrats will stop fighting. This matter is too important not to act, even if it means we must act alone to get the Senate working.

TRIBUTE TO SARA SCHWARTZMAN

Madam President, finally, a farewell—as anyone who has been here a while knows, the U.S. Senate is more than just the sum of its elected Members. Making this institution work is a

daunting and awesome responsibility, and while the spotlight often falls on the men and women who stand behind these desks, this place would quickly unravel without the staff who work their magic behind the scenes.

Today, we say goodbye and thank you to one of those incredible staffers, Sara Schwartzman, who will soon leave the Senate to pursue an opportunity with NASA.

I join with all of my colleagues and with the rest of the Senate staff in saying thank you, Sara, and best of luck on the road ahead.

Thirteen years ago, Sara came to the Senate as a legislative support clerk with the executive clerk's office. Over the years, she climbed up the ranks, thanks to her skill and to her dedication, eventually becoming bill clerk in 2015.

For those who don't know, the bill clerk is one of the first gatekeepers for all new bills and resolutions that are introduced to the Senate. It is the bill clerk who brings order and sequence to the actions of this body, recording the Senate's legislative activities, assigning numbers to every bill and resolution, cataloging the status of each.

In good times, this is difficult and precise work. But over the last few years, as we all know, Sara fulfilled her duties in the midst of a global pandemic and has had to adapt in unprecedented ways. Through it all, she never missed a beat.

After 13 years, Sara deserves her gleaming sendoff as she pursues her next adventure in life. And as we say goodbye, we hope she knows she can always call this place home, and we will forever be grateful for all she has done to make this Chamber come to life.

So to Sara, thank you. Thank you for everything. We will miss you, and we can't wait to see what the future has in store for you.

(Applause.)

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

KENTUCKY

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, Western Kentucky is still reeling from last weekend's devastating storm, but support is rolling in from around the Commonwealth, our region, and the country as well.

Yesterday, I spoke with the CEO of LifePoint Health. They operate 10 hospitals in Kentucky, including one in hard-hit Mayfield. Miraculously, their Jackson Purchase Medical Center survived the tornado mostly intact. Now it is offering much needed medical services right there in Mayfield.

Nurses and doctors have worked literally day and night. LifePoint Health shipped water tankers to their facility to bolster local supply, and the company has pledged a million dollars to help Kentucky rebuild.

Across our region, individuals and companies are opening their hearts, homes, and wallets to help.

We have received important assistance from here in Washington as well. Yesterday, the President announced the Federal Government will fund the entire cost of debris removal and emergency protective measures in the eight counties hardest hit by the storm for the next month. Local officials won't need to worry about overstretched budgets. They can just focus on rebuilding.

My team and I are working hard to continue connecting Kentuckians with the resources they need. I have set up a portal on my Senate office website to help my constituents access government assistance. It has a full list of services provided by our disaster response Agencies.

Because of the Federal Government's swift action in the past week, victims of these tornadoes can access housing assistance, legal aid, crisis counseling, and more.

I recommend every impacted Kentuckian take advantage of these resources, and my office is here to help you navigate.

I will travel back to Kentucky tomorrow to visit several of the communities that were hit hardest and meet with local leaders who are spearheading recovery efforts. I will listen to their concerns and bring their stories back to Washington to ensure that they get the help they desperately need.

The scene on the ground in Western Kentucky is still devastating and quite discouraging. For far too many families, this Christmas will be tragically abnormal. But we will continue to work together to provide Kentucky with the resources it needs to recover, bigger and better than before.

BUILD BACK BETTER ACT

Now, Madam President, on an entirely different matter, two in three Americans want the Federal Government to "cut back on spending and printing money." That is two out of three Americans want the Federal Government to cut back on spending and printing money. But our Democratic colleagues spent the last several months trying as hard as possible to do exactly—exactly—the opposite.

Washington Democrats have spent months trying to borrow, print, and spend trillions more dollars, right into the teeth of the worst inflation in almost 40 years.

They have sought to turn their monthly welfare entitlement with no work requirements from a temporary COVID measure into a permanent policy—cash welfare with no work requirements, literally forever.

Seventy-six percent of Americans say these handouts haven't helped their families at all. Yet Democrats want to dump many billions more.

Just step back and look at all the ways their leftwing wish list could hurt a young family in middle America.

First, they would need to cross their fingers that the private or employer-sponsored insurance they chose to

meet their family's specific needs isn't shoved off a cliff in Democrats' latest lurch toward more socialized medicine. And they will have to hope their war on the medical innovation sector doesn't prevent the development of lifesaving cures their family might have relied on some years down the road.

Say the family has one or two young kids. Maybe their ideal arrangement is a church-based daycare. They would need to say a prayer their faith-based center isn't sued and chased out of business thanks to Washington Democrats' toddler takeover.

Their plan would give nothing to full-time parents, grandparent caregivers, nanny shares, or neighborhood co-ops. It would push faith-based providers out of the public square by design, and it could inflate daycare costs—listen to this—by up to \$12,000 or \$13,000 per child per year.

If Democrats get their way, let's hope neither parent is one of the many Americans who work in our domestic energy sector. Our colleagues' bill has a huge pile of new redtape aimed at putting their industry literally out of business.

But no matter where they work, they will face inflated prices to heat their homes and fill up at the gas pump.

For all of these bad ideas and many more, our colleagues wanted to spend trillions upon trillions more dollars right into the teeth—into the teeth—of runaway inflation that they have already caused.

Yesterday, we got indications the far left's slapdash sprint may be hitting the pause button. Well, that would certainly be great news for the American people. The best Christmas gift Washington could give working families would be putting this bad bill on ice.

SENATE RULES

Madam President, now, on another matter, as cracks keep forming in the Democrats' reckless taxing-and-spending spree, some of our colleagues seemed to channel their frustration into even more radical attempts to attack our government institutions.

In the span of a few hours, one Senate Democrat had renewed calls to "nuke" the Senate and break the rules, and another published a national op-ed arguing that Democrats should attack the rule of law and pack the Supreme Court—two frontal assaults on two branches of government proposed in the space of about 2 hours. Entire generations of statesmen would have seen either one of these unhinged proposals as Armageddon for our institutions. Ah, but apparently today's Democrats try both at once and just call it Wednesday.

We have heard false claims that the Senate obeying our rules to address the debt limit somehow paves the way for radicals to break the rules.

Madam President, I would ask unanimous consent that an additional statement on that subject be printed in a different place in the RECORD.

ELECTIONS

Madam President, so, look, we have discussed over and over again why Democrats will not be allowed to federalize our elections and lord over all 50 States like a self-appointed board of elections on steroids. My colleagues across the aisle have pushed absurd bills that would do things like neuter voter ID laws; make every State legalize ballot harvesting; turn the Federal Election Commission into a biased, partisan body; and even send taxpayer money to political campaigns.

It isn't about "voting rights"; it is a naked power grab. Democrats have been pushing the same kinds of bills literally for years, even as their stated justifications have changed wildly. When Republicans win elections or start polling well, Democrats and the media say our democracy is badly broken, on death's door, and needs a radical overhaul. The answers presented are these policies. When Democrats win elections, Democrats and the media say our democracy is sterling, beyond reproach, and just needs modest safeguards to protect the status quo, but, again, the answers presented are the very same policies.

Lately, their pretext has been demagogic attacks on State voting laws and proposals. If any State scraps any of the temporary pandemic procedures that Democratic operatives favor, the radical left says the sky is falling. But outside of the liberal bubble, nobody buys this nonsense. The country is not buying the hysteria.

On election day last month—listen to this—even in deep-blue New York, voters rejected liberal ballot measures that would have liberalized no-excuse absentee voting and loosened up the rules on voter registration. Both those were voted down in New York. Not even blue New York wants these policies to weaken their elections. But some Democrats want to break the Senate and trash its rules to force these sorts of things on all 50 States? It is beyond absurd.

I understand my colleagues are frustrated they may not get to spend \$4.9 trillion on the way out the door for Christmas, but, believe me, lashing out at our democracy, at the Supreme Court, and at the Senate itself is not going to solve anything.

SENATE RULES

Madam President, last week, bipartisan majorities in the Senate and House passed S. 610 and the President signed the bill into law.

This law prevented painful Medicare cuts and established a one-time, expedited, simple-majority process to make Senate Democrats raise the nation's debt limit with only Democratic votes.

This week, some far-left activists and Senate Democrats who have spent months agitating to "nuke" the Senate are pretending that S. 610 represented some novel watershed for the Senate that gives them license to attack the institution.

These are factual claims, and they are false.

First, S. 610 needed to clear and did clear a 60-vote threshold. Sixty-four Senators voted to invoke cloture on the motion to concur in the House amendment. The Senate's consideration and passage of the bill fully obeyed the Standing Rules of the Senate.

By contrast, ramming through a different fast-track procedure—or any other piece of legislation—with 50 votes over the objections of Senators requesting the 60-vote threshold would mean "going nuclear," shredding the rules, and destroying the filibuster.

Last week, the Senate followed the rules. The far left wants Democrats to break the rules. There is no comparison.

Second, there was nothing novel about S. 610 establishing a new, limited, expedited, simple-majority Senate procedure via statute.

The Senate has passed many such laws creating many such procedures. Examples date back at least to the 1930s.

The much-used budget reconciliation process—with its limited, expedited, simple-majority Senate procedure—is a statutory creation of the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 and its amendments.

Other examples include the Trade Act of 1974, the Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990, the Congressional Review Act of 1996, the Budget Control Act of 2011, and the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015. In all these instances, the Senate passed laws that set up new, limited, expedited, simple-majority Senate procedures for considering specific issues within specific parameters.

In this historical context, the one-time Senate process that S. 610 created was notably limited and minimalist. It could only be accessed once, during a narrow stretch of time, for one specific purpose, with no other provisions or amendments permitted.

In sum, the Senate's recent action on the debt limit did not change the filibuster any more than BRAC, TPA, or the Budget "Super-Committee" changed the filibuster—which is to say, not at all.

As the widely admired and acclaimed expert on Senate procedure Marty Gold summarized last week, "this expedited procedure will be created in accordance with the Standing Rules of the Senate, through passage of a regular order bill. The entire process must begin with 60 votes. [And] if it becomes law, it will be the narrowest expedited procedure ever passed."

Last week's episode did not give radicals any pretext to wreck the Senate. Just the opposite. The Senate's functioning confirmed again that the current Senate rules generate bipartisan compromise when the country needs it.

TRIBUTE TO SARA SCHWARTZMAN

Madam President, now on one final matter, when the Senate does adjourn

for the holidays, we will also bid farewell to a talented Senate staff leader who has kept our institution running.

Sara Schwartzman is one of the Senate's finest. Sara has been a familiar face around the Senate and on the dais for more than a decade, and the most visible parts of her work as the Senate's bill clerk have certainly made her "C-SPAN famous."

For years, she was among the foremost experts on the pronunciation of "Mr. Alexander." More recently, she has become well practiced in the delivery of "Ms. BALDWIN." But Sara's speaking role barely scratches the surface of her crucial responsibilities as the bill clerk. Day in and day out, she and her team are the traffic cops for mountains of legislative text and amendments. Sara tracks the paper and the records. Before the Senate can formally pass anything, it has to make a stop at her desk.

As if these core duties weren't enough to keep even the most meticulous multitasker busy, Sara has generously made herself available to folks throughout the institution as an informal resource. Bill status? Procedural hurdles? Sara's encyclopedic expertise has been just a phone call away. It is safe to say her colleagues will miss this other sort of Senate hotline.

As for Sara, one might worry that someone whose job is a part of every late-night vote and weekend session would struggle to fill her newfound free time, but I understand that, in this case, the Senate's loss is another storied institution's gain. Sara is leaving Washington but staying in public service, working in an exciting role with NASA.

So, Sara, thank you for your years of service, and good luck in the exciting chapters ahead.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, let me first echo the comments of Senator MCCONNELL, as well as Senator SCHUMER earlier, in wishing Sara Schwartzman the very best in her next undertaking.

Whatever the challenge may be, I hope the hours are better because I know that the sacrifices made by you and members of our staff because of our peculiar scheduling in the Senate have caused some strains and stress and pressure and hardship.

But thank you so much for making the Senate better with your service every single day.

LITHUANIA AND BELARUS

Madam President, I have tried to visualize this experience so many times: It was in July of 1911, and a ship arrived in Baltimore from Germany. A family came down the gangplank. One of the members of the family was my grandmother, and she brought her three children. One of them was a 2-year-old little girl—blonde-haired—named Ona, my mother.

How they managed to navigate their way through Baltimore and catch a

train to East St. Louis, IL, I will never know because there were virtually none of them able to speak English, but they did. They arrived, and I grew up the son of a Lithuanian immigrant who was proud of what her family left behind and prouder still of what they found in this great country as Lithuanian Americans.

I have had a special attachment and interest in the Baltic States—and particularly Lithuania—ever since. It has been my good fortune to follow their history from Soviet occupation and oppression to freedom and democracy today.

If you go on a search engine on your computer and type in the word "fearless," don't be surprised if the map of Lithuania pops up. This small nation, 2.6 million in population, has done some remarkable things in history and remarkable still in modern history.

For half a century, millions lived under the tyranny and oppression of the Soviet Union. Before I was elected to public office, I went to visit Vilnius in Lithuania in 1978, and I saw Soviet rule firsthand. I am glad I did because it is such a sharp contrast to the Lithuania of today.

In the late 1980s, things began to change, particularly in the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Who can forget when 2 million people—2 million people—joined hands across these three nations to form a 420-mile Baltic Chain of Freedom in August of 1989. Not long thereafter, in February of the following year, Lithuania held its first free elections since World War II, voting for the country's first post-war noncommunist government. Immediately thereafter, the new Parliament voted to make Lithuania the first occupied Soviet republic to declare independence. Lithuania's bold move was followed later that year by Latvia and Estonia.

These brave efforts culminated a year later in February of 1991 when the Lithuanian people voted for independence. Those brave Lithuanians 30 years ago, including my friend, music professor, and national leader Vytautas Landsbergis, led that country back to democracy.

That Lithuanian effort three decades ago is still alive today. As a vibrant and vital member of the European Union and NATO, this small and brave nation is standing firm against renewed Russian aggression and now Chinese economic intimidation and defending heroic efforts to end tyranny in Belarus. It is one of the most vocal countries on Earth in defending democratic values and norms. Is it because they have a nuclear stockpile? No. A massive army? No. They are just determined, principled people who are courageous.

Some years ago, I visited the Lithuanian town of Rukla, where U.S. and German forces were rotating through as part of the European Reassurance Initiative aimed at keeping the Baltic safe from Russian aggression. There

was good reason for it. They knew they had to take seriously what Putin might do against them.

Russia, under Vladimir Putin, has undertaken regular military, cyber, and political efforts to destabilize Lithuania and the Baltic States, but Lithuania will not be bullied. And I am glad that in the just-passed National Defense Authorization Act, we reaffirmed our commitment to Baltic security in the amendment that I offered.

Lithuania is also standing firm against the giant nation of China, which is trying to cut off supplies and punish the Lithuanian economy simply because the Lithuanians have established trade ties with Taiwan. Yet again, Lithuania will not be bullied.

On Lithuania's immediate border, there is a heroic struggle to end the last dictator in Europe, Lukashenko in Belarus. Most of us remember last year when this Belarusian dictator, Lukashenko, once again, after the bogus election results were announced, proceeded to jail those who had the temerity to run against him in the election. That has become normal with this man. This dictator, if somebody shows the nerve to run against him, will announce that he has beaten them by 80 percent-plus and then put them in jail.

When popular social media personality Sergei Tikhanovsky found himself arbitrarily jailed, his wife Svetlana Tikhanovskaya courageously stepped in to run in his place. She probably won that election, but of course Lukashenko would never allow those results to be announced. So what did she do after the election, her husband in jail? She fled Belarus. Where did she go for safety for herself and her children? Lithuania. Not surprisingly, Lithuania. She found a welcoming nation next door, and she continues her struggle for a free and democratic Belarus out of Vilnius, Lithuania.

Belarus and Russia have retaliated against Lithuania with cruel and manufactured migrant flows and other intimidation, but once again, Lithuania will not be bullied.

Secretary of State Blinken understands the importance of this Lithuanian nation and continues to make sure they know they have friends in the United States. He recently hosted Lithuanian Foreign Minister and grandson of Vytautas Landsbergis at the State Department and then traveled to the Baltic States to reaffirm American solidarity.

Blinken said clearly at the State Department that Foreign Minister Landsbergis "has been such a strong voice for democracy and human rights not just in Lithuania, but around the world." I couldn't agree more. I couldn't be more proud.

So let's use this 30th anniversary of Lithuanian independence to stand firm with our brave ally and recommit to our continued support for our Baltic allies through economic and security cooperation. Doing so will help ensure

the next 30 years of the longstanding U.S.-Baltic friendship are equally strong and fruitful.

In early 2011, a trip through these same Baltic countries gave me one more extraordinary experience in my Senate career. I went on a road trip from the free, democratic Lithuania back in time to the closed, totalitarian nation of Belarus. Crossing over that border was like driving onto a Hollywood movie set. I looked along the roads for telephone poles or evidence of electricity and found none. It looked like a bucolic, rural village, mile after mile after mile, indicating how economic development has still yet to arrive in Belarus.

You see, this last dictatorship of Europe held a Presidential election in December 2010, and I wanted to be there in 2011 to meet with the families of those who had the temerity to run against Lukashenko and were in jail. So I drove from Vilnius to Minsk to meet with those family members. They had been arrested by the security services of Belarus, which are still called the KGB.

It was a sobering meeting. Many tears were shed. Fortunately, over time, by working at it doggedly, we eventually saw the release of all the brave Belarusians who had been jailed at that time.

Yet, tragically, the Belarusian people found themselves in the same outrageous situation last year when Lukashenko jailed these candidates with the courage to run, including Sergei Tikhanovskiy.

Some of you may have read the outstanding profile about his wife, Svetlana, in this month's New Yorker. It is entitled "The Accidental Revolutionary Leading Belarus's Uprising." It describes how her campaign speeches galvanized boisterous crowds. She had a very simple message to the Belarusian people and the courage to say it. She said she was "fed up with living in humiliation and fear" in Belarus. Lukashenko, this mighty dictator, didn't even have the courage to debate this woman.

She likely won that election, as we know, but we will never know the official outcome because Lukashenko wouldn't allow it.

I was proud to host her last year with my Senate colleagues Senator SHAHEEN and SULLIVAN. And I am glad to see that President Biden met with her as well.

She is a brave woman, soldiering on, despite the fact that the Belarusians announced just a week ago that her husband has now been sentenced to 18 years in prison.

Tragically, since Lukashenko stole that most recent election, he has continued to double down on his outrageous behavior, including forcing down a commercial airline in May to arrest the Belarusian activists and just this week, after months of closed hearings, that 18-year prison sentence for her husband.

Five other defendants, including another Presidential candidate and a journalist from Radio Free Europe, received an equally outrageous sentence from Lukashenko. What a waste; what an outright theft of the Belarusian people's future.

These people must be freed, and we must continue to support Ms. Tikhanovskaya's effort, and her husband, and the thousands upon thousands who peacefully protest on her behalf.

LITHUANIA

Madam President, this morning I was listening to the news, as I came in, on National Public Radio. And I will close by just noting that the most recent report led me to make this statement on the floor today.

It seems that the Lithuanians have been compelled to close their Embassy in Beijing. The Chinese Government will no longer promise the most basic tenet of ambassadorial representation: diplomatic immunity. They are still angry because this little country of 2.6 million people is establishing trade relations with Taiwan.

The Chinese have said they are cutting off all exports and imports to Lithuania, putting pressure on them for their political courage. It won't work, I might say, to Prime Minister Xi. These people are not going to be bullied or pushed around. They have shown an extraordinary amount of courage. And I hope all of the world, particularly their great allies here in the United States, understand that these Baltic States—and my mother's country of Lithuania—are standing up for values which we all treasure as Americans.

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

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

ECONOMY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, Democrats' push to pass their tax-and-spending spree continues to throw into sharp relief the difference between Republicans' and Democrats' vision of government. And it is about a lot more than just the amount of money we want to spend. Of course, the amount of money we are spending matters, but it is also about what that money represents.

In general, more money means more government. And more government usually means less freedom. Republicans don't oppose Democrats' tax-and-spending spree just because it would cost a lot of money or drive up our national debt.

It would do both of those things, of course, with negative consequences for our economy and the prosperity of American families. And the negative

economic consequences alone are sufficient reason to oppose Democrats' "Build Back Bankrupt" plan. But it is a lot more than just about excessive spending.

With their "Build Back Bankrupt" plan, Democrats envision a society which government is intimately involved in nearly every aspect of Americans' life—from, to quote a New York Times article, "cradle to grave." And that is not a vision Republicans share, primarily because a government that is intimately involved in nearly every aspect of your life is a government that is going to exert control over your life. More government inevitably means more government control.

Take Democrats' childcare plan in their Build Back Better legislation. To hear Democrats talk about it, you might think this plan involves nothing more than cutting checks to American parents to help with their childcare bills, but that is not the case.

First, of course, Democrats take the opportunity to add a lot of new childcare mandates and regulations. According to one estimate, Democrats' childcare subsidy measure could drive up the cost of daycare by somewhere around \$13,000 per child. Good luck working that into your family budget.

Democrats' government subsidy program is set up to favor certain kinds of childcare and childcare providers. It is set up to favor institutional childcare, rather than home care or other models like neighborhood co-ops, and it is set up to place religious providers at a disadvantage.

That is right. Despite the fact that a majority of working families who use center-based care opt for faith-based centers, Democrats' program is set up to put these providers at a disadvantage. It denies them facilities funding that is granted to secular providers.

And it would disqualify—I should say, it could disqualify many providers with traditional religious beliefs like those shared by millions upon millions of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Muslim families around the country.

It could even disqualify a provider simply because the provider gave placement preference to families of its own faith. So if you are a Catholic Church with a childcare program and you give preference to families who attend your church, you could be accused of discrimination and disqualified from receiving government subsidies.

And if you are a parent who can't afford that program without those government subsidies—thanks to government mandates and regulations that have hiked up the childcare bill—you are out of luck. If you need those government subsidies, you will have to send your child to one of the providers the government prefers.

The childcare program in the Democrats' tax-and-spending spree provides a perfect example of what happens when government gets involved. And it is about a lot more than how much money the government is spending.

With government money comes government control. The decision is no longer just in the individual's hands. And the more substantial the government involvement, the larger the government's role in decision making is likely to be—whether the issue is childcare, healthcare, education, or anything else.

In his 1967 inaugural address as Governor of California, Ronald Reagan said:

Freedom is a fragile thing and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people.

Freedom is a fragile thing.

Here in the United States, we have enjoyed an unprecedented degree of individual liberty—a liberty that it is very easy for us to take for granted. But that liberty is not guaranteed. It is something that must be fought for and protected.

And that doesn't involve simply safeguarding our liberty from external threats from foreign powers; it involves ensuring making sure that our government doesn't start to exceed its proper role.

The loss of freedom can come dramatically or it can come quietly through a steady increase of government encroachment.

And it is important to remember that freedom can be eroded or taken away by the well-meaning, and not just those who are actively hostile to it.

I believe that my Democrat colleagues likely do not see their ideas for dramatic government expansion as threatening Americans' personal freedom. The problem is that when you expand the reach of government, the diminishment of liberty is inevitable. Expand the reach of government into Americans' lives, and it is inevitable that you are going to transfer some of Americans' decision-making power over to politicians and bureaucrats in Washington.

Democrats' tax-and-spending spree—and its major expansion of government—is far from the only threat to Americans' liberties that we are seeing from the Democratic Party.

I am increasingly disturbed by Democrats' tendency to play fast and loose with religious liberty and the First Amendment—whether that involves disadvantaging religious childcare providers, threatening individuals' right to live according to their conscience, questioning judges' fitness for office based on religious belief, or, as we learned recently from a courageous whistleblower FBI agent, even opening the door for the FBI to collect information on parents voicing their opposition to local school policies during school board meetings.

I am also disturbed by Democrats' clear belief that Americans should defer to government and Democrat-approved experts, as spectacularly evidenced in the Virginia Governor's race,

which was unquestionably decided based partly on the Democrat candidate's repeatedly expressed belief that parents shouldn't be involved in the content of their children's education.

I am puzzled as to why Democrats are so convinced—so convinced—that Washington elites or Democrat-approved experts are better at making decisions than ordinary Americans.

As Ronald Reagan said in that same speech:

[I]t's hard to explain those among us who even today would question the people's capacity for self-government. I've often wondered if they will answer, those who subscribe to that philosophy: if no one among us is capable of governing himself, then who among us has the capacity to govern someone else?

I believe that the American people are capable of governing themselves—of making their own decisions—and that they are actually generally going to be better at it than a bunch of bureaucrats in Washington.

And I strongly oppose efforts to substitute the judgments of Washington bureaucrats—or Democrat politicians—for the judgment of individual Americans.

It states in the Declaration of Independence that governments are instituted to preserve our unalienable rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Preserving liberty is a fundamental purpose of government, but, of course, before you can enjoy liberty, you have to enjoy the right to life. For a long time now, the Democratic Party has consistently denied the right to life to a whole segment of the American population: unborn Americans.

There is no better example of their aggressive pro-abortion extremism than the so-called Women's Health Protection Act the Democrats in the House passed in September. This legislation, which would more accurately be termed the "Abortion on Demand Act," would eliminate almost every democratically passed State abortion restriction, no matter how mild. It would endanger the religious and conscience rights of doctors and nurses, and, of course, it ignores the clear position of the American people, a strong majority of whom support restrictions on abortion.

Apparently, Democrats are not content with joining repressive regimes like China and North Korea as one of a tiny handful of nations that allow elective abortion past 20 weeks of pregnancy. No, they want to remove even the mildest and most widely supported restrictions on abortion. That is yet another example of Democrats' tendency to think they know better than the American people.

The Republican vision—the conservative vision, the vision that I share—is a vision that foregrounds liberty, not government; that believes individuals acting freely generally tend to do a better job of making decisions than a

small handful of politicians and bureaucrats in Washington.

We believe in government as a backstop, not Big Brother. A system of permanent government dependence erodes individual liberty, to say nothing of the ways in which it undermines prosperity, robs individuals of the purpose and pride that comes with work and achievement.

Government should create the conditions in which freedom, opportunity, and prosperity can flourish, not attempt to secure particular outcomes or to dictate the paths that Americans should take.

We are privileged to live in the freest country the world has ever known. It is not a privilege we can or should take for granted, and it is a privilege that we can all too easily lose. Our liberty is, as Ronald Reagan said, ever only one generation away from extinction.

I will continue to make safeguarding that liberty that we have been given one of my most cherished priorities, whether that involves fighting for the right to life of unborn Americans, opposing attempts to restrict religious liberty, or fighting against an expansion of government that would push out parents and put the government in the driver's seat on way too many issues.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The senior Senator from Maryland.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. CARDIN. Madam President, on March 3 of this year, over 9 months ago, President Biden nominated Dilawar Syed to be the Deputy Administrator of the Small Business Administration.

Mr. Syed has spent decades building and scaling successful businesses, as well as advocating for struggling entrepreneurs and small business owners in underserved areas. It is clear that he is eminently qualified to help lead the SBA at a time when the Agency is providing unprecedented assistance to help small businesses survive and recover from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Last April, during Mr. Syed's hearing before the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee, my Republican colleagues raised concerns about PPP and EIDL loans received by Lumiata, the company for which Mr. Syed served as CEO. As chairman of the committee, I gave a commitment to work in a bipartisan manner to secure additional information from the SBA about these loans.

I kept my word. On June 8, the SBA made materials on the loans available for my review, for the ranking member's review, and for the review of every Member of the committee. The materials proved that there was absolutely nothing irregular about these loans. In fact, the company did the right thing and repaid the forgivable PPP loan after its lenders determined

that the company did not require that level of government assistance. You wish more companies would have followed the lead that this company did.

But then, a week later, a new issue arose. Republican Members accused Mr. Syed of having anti-Israel bias because of his involvement with Emgage, a nonprofit organization that supports the Muslim American community. This accusation was completely unfounded. As the American Jewish Committee wrote:

The unsupported accusation that somehow Jewish businesses or those with ties to Israel may not fare as well under Mr. Syed's leadership in the Small Business Administration (SBA) has no factual grounding. Indeed, he has specifically disavowed support for the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement, which seeks the dissolution of Israel.

The AJC went on to say that Republican accusations against Mr. Syed were "un-American."

Two weeks later, after the AJC released its statements, Republicans on the committee concocted yet another reason to block Mr. Syed's nomination. This time it was Planned Parenthood. Committee Republicans announced that they would boycott all votes on the nomination because Planned Parenthood affiliates received loans under the Paycheck Protection Program, despite the fact that these loans were made during the Trump administration and had nothing to do with Mr. Syed.

In response to Republican demands, on November 24, Administrator Guzman sent the committee a detailed four-page response that gave a full explanation of SBA's policy on providing PPP loans to nonprofits, including Planned Parenthood. The SBA provided the specific data on the number of loans to Planned Parenthood affiliates, as well as the total dollars loaned and forgiven. The Administrator's letter makes clear that the SBA is implementing affiliation standards for Planned Parenthood in the same manner it is implementing the affiliation standards for other nonprofits such as United Way, Boys and Girls Clubs, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Goodwill.

Then there was another request for information and, once again, the SBA sent another detailed letter to our committee to the ranking member, Senator RAND PAUL, dated December 15, 2021. That letter spells out the specifics on every loan given out by the SBA—again, under the Trump administration, initially—to the Planned Parenthood affiliates: the numbers that apply for PPP; the numbers that withdrew those applications; the total dollar amounts; the loans that were forgiven under the original PPP amount and the total dollar amounts; the amount of PPP No. 2 loans given out requested by Planned Parenthood; the number that were withdrawn; the dollar amount that was given out; the dollar amount that has been forgiven. All that has been made available to our committee by the Small Business Administration.

Quite frankly, I don't know what else we can do. The SBA is required to carry out the laws that Congress passed. We made it clear we wanted nonprofits eligible for the help under the small business loan programs that we created. We made it clear that the affiliation rules would be applied, and the affiliation rules were applied the same way they were applied to all nonprofits that have a national affiliation. And the initial determination made under the Trump administration was reviewed under the Biden administration to make sure that those affiliate rules were applied and they were applied fairly to all nonprofits.

Thanks to the hard work of the SBA personnel, tens of millions of small businesses and nonprofits have received Federal assistance to keep their doors open and their employees on staff. The SBA has provided relief through multiple rounds of the Paycheck Protection Program, EIDL loan program, targeted grant programs, the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant Program, and the Restaurant Revitalization Fund.

Unfortunately, the SBA has had to implement these programs without the benefit of a Deputy Administrator, the person whose job it is to oversee the day-to-day operations of the Agency, and it gives us an opportunity to have a confirmed person at the SBA who is answerable to Congress and the American people.

Many nonpartisan, small business organizations support the nomination of Mr. Syed, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Investor Alliance, and the Small Business Entrepreneurship Council. I could read into the record numerous recommendation letters from the whole gambit of the stakeholder community.

In April, the Chamber of Commerce wrote to the committee stating:

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce supports the nomination of Dilawar Syed to be Deputy Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). We believe that it is essential for SBA's senior leadership team to be in place to deliver on the agency's COVID-19 small business emergency relief responsibilities and we believe Mr. Syed is well qualified for this position.

I agree. That is why, again, I am going to ask that the nomination be discharged from the Small Business Committee and Mr. Syed receive an up-or-down vote on this nomination. I might tell you that we have had action in our committee. So this is not inconsistent with the action of our committee.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Small Business Committee be discharged and the Senate proceed to the following nomination: PN231, Dilawar Syed, of California, to be Deputy Administrator of the Small Business Administration; that the nomination be confirmed; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any related statement be

printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The junior Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Reserving the right to object, the Hyde Amendment was passed in 1976. This amendment prohibits Federal funds from going directly to pay for abortion. For 40-some-odd years, this has had some effect on trying to prevent money directly going from the taxpayer to fund abortion.

The reason for this amendment was that many people have profound religious beliefs that their money, their taxpayer dollars, shouldn't go to kill the unborn. This is a big deal, the Hyde Amendment.

Right now, currently, appropriations for the last 40 years have always had Hyde Amendment protections. But now we discover, under duress, the Small Business Administration admits that \$100 million has been given to Planned Parenthood without Hyde protections.

So this \$100 million, which is essentially about one-third of what they get every year from the Federal Government, has no Hyde prescriptions, no Hyde restrictions, and this money can go directly to those performing abortions. So the abortionist that does thousands of abortions each year is getting money directly from the Federal Government to pay his or her salary. This is a first in 40 years, and it is not a small matter.

This is an extraordinary thing that the Federal Government, for the first time in 40-some-odd years, is directly paying for abortions. This shouldn't happen.

This is worth a debate, and we only discovered this because of holding up a nominee to try to get information. The Small Business Administration has steadfastly hidden this information, tried not to reveal it and is slowly, little by little, giving some, which they gave yesterday a little bit more, but they have been resisting and resisting and resisting.

The Small Business Administration originally ruled that Planned Parenthood was a big business—an extraordinarily big business, a business with 16,000 people. Planned Parenthood themselves calls them "affiliates." They count their income all together. They pool their income and put out documents saying this is how much we have all together.

Thirty-eight of these Planned Parenthoods were sent a notice saying: You have illegally obtained this money. You are not a small business, and you should return it.

Supposedly, these entities then protested and appealed the process.

The Small Business Administration, after months and months and months, still refuses to reveal the appeals process or what the complaints were. We have not gotten those documents, although we asked repeatedly for these documents.

This nomination does directly have to do with this because, whoever is in charge of PPP, you would want someone to be an honest broker who says: By golly, this looks suspicious. How come this information is not being revealed to Congress? How come Congress is not allowed to see this?

The Small Business Administration will say it is confidential. That does not apply to Congress's oversight. That might apply to releasing it to the public, but that doesn't apply to Congress's oversight of the Small Business Administration.

This is an extraordinary thing that has happened—\$100 million given directly to pay for people to do abortions. It is outside the scope and contrary to the scope of the Hyde Amendment, and it is something worth having a significant and prolonged and protracted battle until all the documents are revealed.

Madam President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The senior Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. I certainly regret that an objection has been made, but let me at least correct the record. PPP money, Paycheck Protection money, does not go to healthcare services. It goes to personnel costs. It goes to related expenses. It does not go to healthcare services.

The law that we pass is the law that the administration implemented. There were no restrictions referenced to what Senator PAUL is referring to included in the Paycheck Protection Program. The restrictions on a non-profit dealt with affiliation rules. Those affiliation rules were applied to Planned Parenthood as they were applied to similar organizations that I already put into the RECORD.

What Senator PAUL is complaining about could have been taken up during the debate of the Paycheck Protection Program, but it was not.

The bill was passed with Republican majorities in this body and with President Trump signing it into law. It would have been against the will of Congress for the Trump administration under the SBA or under the Biden administration under the SBA to use its own judgment and not the judgment of the policymaking branch of government—the legislative branch of government.

So I just want to put on the record that the response by Senator PAUL is not the factual circumstances that we are dealing with. We are dealing with a qualified person who should be confirmed by this body, and the administration is carrying out the will of Congress in the way that it has implemented the Paycheck Protection Program.

With that, 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.

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

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

UKRAINE

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, the eyes of the world are on Russia as it stages a military buildup on the Ukrainian border. Russia could literally invade Ukraine at any time. And the United States and the international community need to take strong, decisive action to dissuade a Russian offensive from invading Ukraine. I was glad to see the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, denounce Russia's action earlier today, but clearly words are not enough. Statements of support are not enough to counter an invasion. The United States and our NATO allies must provide additional support to Ukraine as they defend their borders, and time is of the essence.

Senator DURBIN, the Senator from Illinois, and I have introduced a resolution to provide complete clarity on the U.S. Senate's position on this imminent conflict. Our resolution affirms the unwavering support of the United States for a secure, democratic, and independent Ukraine, but it also asserts the need for action. Our resolution calls on the Biden administration to provide additional lethal aid to Ukraine to counter ongoing Russian aggression.

Senator DURBIN and I have been proud to notch a long list of bipartisan cosponsors, and I hope the Senate will pass this resolution before we break at the end of the year.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Madam President, on another matter, the first year of the Biden Presidency and the Democratic-majority controlled Congress is quickly coming to an end. Looking at everything that has happened so far this year, it is tough to imagine the American people are happy with how things are going.

President Biden raised all of our hopes and expectations during his inauguration, as he built his campaign and then spoke at his inauguration on a simple theme: unity. He talked about the need for people across the country to come together and empathize with one another and to work together. He promised to be a uniting force in Washington, DC, and pointed to his service in the U.S. Senate as evidence of his ability to work across the aisle to broker bipartisan deals.

Clearly, this message was welcomed by the American people. After all, they gave him the job in the first place. But just because voters picked a Democratic President doesn't mean they signed off on a radical transformation of our country. The American people elected a 50-50 Senate and lessened the Democratic majority in the House.

In short, Americans selected a President who promised to work across the aisle and a closely divided Congress—

and gave us a closely divided Congress to ensure that he kept his word, but the American people have not gotten what they expected.

Right from the start, there were clear signs of where things were headed. At the beginning of the year, the two party leaders negotiated an organizing statement to determine how the 50-50 Senate would function. In light of the far-left's newfound obsession with eliminating the filibuster, Leader MCCONNELL asked for assurances from Leader SCHUMER that the filibuster would remain intact. After all, it is not unreasonable to ask your negotiating partner to commit to not breaking the rules.

Even though Senator SCHUMER once said we should "build a firewall around the legislative filibuster," he refused to agree to leave it alone, which was not very encouraging. Fortunately, two of our Democratic colleagues have committed to protect the filibuster, which ensures that there will be something that maybe is a little unnatural for human nature—to try to force us to work together to build consensus to do things like we did yesterday: pass the National Defense Authorization Act. That is not necessarily our first instinct.

But protecting the filibuster is important. It provides stability and continuity and predictability in our Nation's laws and to make sure that we don't add to the chaos by, every 2 years, after every election, reversing everything that had been done the previous 2 years.

We saw how tempted our Democratic colleagues were to use their newfound powers in the majority. That meant, unfortunately, forget working across the aisle or striking bipartisan deals—Senator SCHUMER made clear he wanted an easy path for purely partisan legislation.

The first item on his agenda was a \$2 trillion liberal wish list unconvincingly disguised as pandemic relief. It included things like backdoor funding for Planned Parenthood, a blank check for mismanaged union pension systems, and money for climate justice. This had very, very little to do with COVID-19 and the pandemic, which is how it was sold.

The Democratic leader got a taste of partisan legislating and decided that he wanted more of it, so he tried to break the two Democratic Members on his side of the aisle who were protecting bipartisanship and consensus building. He lined up votes on some of our colleagues' most controversial bills, all of which were designed to fail. There was a bill that exploited the cause of pay fairness to line the pockets of trial lawyers. Unsurprisingly, it did not pass.

Senator SCHUMER forecasted votes on two bills that were so unpopular among Democrats that they didn't even make it to the Senate floor. One was to erode the American people's Second Amendment rights, and another would punish

schools and hospitals that refused to comply with “woke” social norms.

But without a doubt, the most dangerous legislation Democrats have pushed is to overhaul America’s election system. The version of the bill we voted on this summer was so bad that I was surprised Democrats even had the gall to hold a vote on it.

The bill would have turned the bipartisan Federal Election Commission into a Democratic-controlled, partisan body. It would have seized States’ constitutional authority to draw their own congressional districts, instead handing all the power to independent redistricting commissions. It would have federalized ballot harvesting—literally vacuuming up ballots and delivering them to a paid campaign staffer and political operatives who had a stake in the outcome of the election. The only thing it would have done for the people is decide the outcome of virtually every future election and—spoiler alert—make sure that Democrats would never lose.

If this bill weren’t so dangerous, it would have been laughable. It is no surprise that the only bipartisan thing about this bill was the opposition. In both the House and the Senate, Republicans and Democrats joined together to defeat this bill.

Still, our Democratic colleagues refused to throw in the towel. They rewrote the bill, tried to rebrand it, and brought it up for another vote in October. Once again, it failed. The Democratic leader has said this partisan legislation will resurface again sometime before the end of next year, but I don’t expect the outcome to change.

Of course, amid all the partisan jockeying, there has been a large, dark cloud looming overhead known as the Build Back Better—or, rather, I think more accurately, “Build Back Bankrupt”—bill. This legislation would drive up the cost of childcare for families and cut healthcare for the uninsured. It would hurt our energy security and increase the already sky-high energy costs. It would put taxpayers on the hook for massive handouts to blue State millionaires, organized labor, trial lawyers, wealthy media corporations, and a host of powerful friends of the Democratic Party.

Our Democratic colleagues have used every trick in the book to make the price of this spending spree look as small as possible. One of our Democratic colleagues even acknowledged the disingenuous advertising.

Fortunately, the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Tax Committee have provided an honest score of the bill that passed the House and that has been proposed here in the Senate—one which ignores the gimmicks our colleagues initially tried to use. The Congressional Budget Office says that this bill would cost \$4.9 trillion in the first 10 years alone—not zero, as President Biden has disingenuously claimed; not \$1.75 trillion, as our Democratic colleagues have claimed; but \$4.9 trillion,

nearly triple the price Democrats have previously been willing to acknowledge. And deficits—money that would have to be repaid by the next generation and beyond—would increase by a staggering \$3 trillion over the next decade.

As it turns out, spending trillions of dollars on unnecessary programs and doling out handouts for the wealthy is not an easy sell. Senator SCHUMER apparently can’t convince all 50 Democrats to vote for the bill.

While our colleagues have focused on these wholly partisan endeavors, they have ignored clear opportunities to work together in a bipartisan effort.

For example, Members of both parties agree that something must be done to bring down prescription drug prices for the American people. This was a major focus last Congress, and there are a range of bipartisan bills that support this goal, including one I have introduced with Senator BLUMENTHAL from Connecticut. So far, we have made no progress for the American people on high prescription drug costs.

Then there is the crisis at the border. On President Biden’s watch, annual border apprehensions have hit an all-time high. For most of the year, though, Democrats refused to acknowledge that any sort of problem actually existed at the southern border. They adopted the same rules as “Fight Club”—they just didn’t talk about it. Vice President HARRIS, named “border czar” by President Biden, didn’t even visit the border until late last June, long after the humanitarian crisis had ballooned to unimaginable heights, and even then, she stayed away from the hardest hit sectors.

Senator SINEMA, a Democrat from Arizona, and I have introduced legislation with commonsense reforms to address the crisis, but the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Senator DURBIN, has declined to mark up the bill or even convene a hearing of the Judiciary Committee to investigate the border crisis and explore possible responses to it.

Democrats and Republicans have shown a willingness to work together to put DACA recipients on a strong legal footing. These are young people known as Dreamers but frequently referred to as DACA, deferred action on childhood arrival, which is the name of the administrative process used by the Obama administration to provide them some legal standing in which to stay in the country. But they have been embroiled in 10 years of unnecessary litigation, and they are uncertain about the outcome of their case. I think this is an area where we could work together to provide them some certainty and some finality.

There are other things we could and should be doing, like securing our most critical supply chains, encouraging innovation in the energy sector, and solving many of the challenges American families are facing every day. But rather than work across the aisle to

address these bipartisan priorities, our colleagues have wasted a year on purely partisan exercises. Again, this is not what the American people thought they were getting when they elected Joe Biden President and when they gave the Senate a 50–50 split.

The 2020 election wasn’t an invitation to codify a liberal wish list; it was a call to work together. And there is no better place for the work that can be done than in the U.S. Senate. There is a lot we can and should accomplish next year, but this sort of partisan, unilateral approach to governing has made that nearly impossible. You can only hope for better next year.

Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle got what they wanted, which was a Democratic majority, given the tie-breaking vote of the Vice President. They have been given the keys to the kingdom, and now, next year, we will see how long they can hold on to them, or perhaps they can change course and return to bipartisan legislating and consensus building for the benefit of the American people.

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.

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

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

CRIME

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I come to the floor today to talk about the rising crime in America and specifically in Democrat-run cities.

This year, 12 American cities have already broken records for murder, and the year isn’t even over. Every one of those cities is run by Democrats.

Last summer, Democrat cities adopted a rallying cry, and that cry was “defund the police.” Joe Biden said America was “systemically racist.” He said police funding should be “redirected.” NANCY PELOSI talked about “shuffling . . . money around.” KAMALA HARRIS, our Vice President, said America should “reimagine public safety.”

Well, lots of Democrat cities put those slogans into practice. Bill de Blasio, the mayor of New York City, cut the New York City Police Department by \$1 billion. The Los Angeles City Council voted to cut police funding by \$150 million. San Francisco cut \$120 million from police over 2 years. Nearly two dozen cities across the country defunded the police. Again, these are all cities run by liberal mayors and administrations. As a result, last year, America experienced the largest surge in homicide ever recorded.

According to the Major Cities Chiefs Association, 63 of America’s 66 biggest cities saw at least 1 category of violent crime go up last year. Minneapolis cut police funding, and homicide nearly

doubled. New York City police funding and homicide went in opposite directions: The funding for police went down, and homicide went up by half. Last year's historic increases in homicides was evident. This year, homicide has gone up even more. The number of police killed in the line of duty is also up.

Here in Washington, DC, President Biden has effectively endorsed the "defund the police" movement. He did that by stacking his administration with supporters of defunding the police.

The Secretary of Labor of the United States, confirmed by this Senate, cut funding for police when he was mayor of Boston.

The No. 3 official at the Department of Justice, confirmed by this Senate, the Democrats in this Senate, testified that she supports "calls from Black Lives Matter . . . activists to decrease police budgets and the scope, role, and responsibility of police in our lives."

Joe Biden's Secretary of the Treasury called for an economics professor to be fired because the professor said he opposed defunding the police. It had nothing to do with what he was teaching. It wasn't because of a problem with his work in the classroom. But Janet Yellen said his comments against defunding the police were "extremely troubling."

She went on to say:

It would be appropriate for the University of Chicago . . . to review [that professor's] performance and suitability.

Well, Janet Yellen is not known for being a crime expert. She is a well-connected, well-known liberal. The university bowed to Janet Yellen and put the professor under investigation. This is Janet Yellen, who was confirmed to be Secretary of the Treasury under Joe Biden.

In October, Joe Biden was asked if police officers should be fired if they weren't vaccinated. He didn't hesitate. He immediately said: Yes, fire them. These are officers who have been putting their lives on the frontline every day since day one of the pandemic. Joe Biden's mantra for the police: Vaccinate or terminate.

This is happening all across America. For example, more than 150 Massachusetts State Police have resigned over the vaccine mandate. Joe Biden would rather see unvaccinated police sit at home than let them continue doing the job they have done all through the pandemic. The last thing we need to do right now is reduce the number of police officers on our streets.

Last week, Democrats in this body gave another promotion to an anti-police liberal. Every Democrat—every Democrat—in this Senate voted to confirm Rachael Rollins as the top prosecutor in the State of Massachusetts. Why does this matter to anybody outside of Massachusetts? Well, because Rachael Rollins is the face of the rogue prosecutor movement. This is the movement led by George Soros and

other powerful liberals. They have invested millions of dollars in electing radical prosecutors. They have succeeded in major cities. We have seen it in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. Once these prosecutors get into office, they impose radical leftwing policies. The result has been chaos and carnage from coast to coast.

As the district attorney in Boston, Rachael Rollins announced she would not prosecute 15 different crimes, laws on the books. She would not prosecute 15 different crimes, including shoplifting, trespassing, and resisting arrest. Rachael Rollins is supposed to be a prosecutor. Her job is to enforce the law. Instead, she has nullified the law.

Joe Biden saw this lawlessness, and he was so impressed that he gave her a big promotion. Every single Democrat in this Senate has given her their stamp of approval. So has Vice President HARRIS. Every Republican voted no on this radical nominee, so the Vice President was needed to come to the Senate to break the tie. There is already talk of Rachael Rollins' getting even more promotions in this very radical, extreme, dangerous, and scary Democratic Party.

Mark my words: Rachael Rollins is the first rogue prosecutor to be given a Federal job. She will not be the last. With Democrats in charge in Washington, Rachael Rollins' policies are coming to a neighborhood near you.

So it is worth asking, how are these policies working out in liberal big cities? Not well, no. San Francisco followed the Rachael Rollins model. They tried legalizing shoplifting; how about that? Now San Francisco looks like a city from the Dark Ages.

Here is how the Associated Press described it last week:

San Francisco residents and visitors scurry past scenes of lawlessness and squalor.

In August, San Francisco broke city records with 3,700 reports of retail theft. Now there is a mass exodus of retail stores from San Francisco.

Last year, twice as many people in San Francisco died from drug overdoses than from coronavirus. The local news reported this week about people leaving their cars unlocked in San Francisco to prevent their windows from getting smashed out. Even the Democrat mayor spoke recently about the "rein of criminals who are destroying our city."

San Francisco is one of the wealthiest cities in the world. It is the hometown of the Speaker of the House and is now a homicide haven on the west coast. Yet, in just a few years, liberal policies have turned what had been a beautiful city into a war zone.

NANCY PELOSI, the Speaker of the House, admitted just yesterday that "there is an attitude of lawlessness in our country" today. Then she added, "It springs from," as she said, "I don't know where."

Well, NANCY PELOSI should look at her own city. It is painfully obvious. The fact that roars out from liberal

city to liberal city is this: The lawlessness comes from the policies of the Democratic Party. Criminals seek opportunity, and when criminals see that opportunity, they pounce.

Look at Los Angeles. This is another city with a rogue prosecutor. In just 10 days last month, looters stole \$340,000 worth of goods from stores. In one case, police arrested 14 of the looters. And then what happened? They were all released. Now they are all walking free.

Austin, TX, made some of the largest police funding cuts last year. This year, Austin has seen a 70-percent increase in murder. It is one of the largest increases in homicide in America.

In KAMALA HARRIS's hometown of Oakland, the city council voted to defund the police in June. Now murder in Oakland, the Vice President's hometown, is up by two-thirds since just 2019.

Last month, a toddler was shot and killed while he slept in the back of his mother's car on the Oakland freeway. Even leftwing Oakland has now had enough. The city is now planning to reverse the cuts to police. For the toddler, it is too late. The damage that took that innocent life from that family can't be undone, can't be repaired. The family will never be reunited.

It is time for the Democrats to wake up, to wake up before it is too late for so many others.

Democrats have controlled the Senate now for 10 months. Yet they have done nothing to improve law enforcement in America. They have done nothing to reduce crime. In fact, Senate Democrats have only tried to reward criminals. Forty-nine Senate Democrats sponsored a bill to give voting rights to felons as soon as they walk out of their jail cells.

The American people reject this bill and Democrats' entire agenda. Voters are speaking out. Just last month, voters rejected defunding police in the cities of Buffalo, New York, and even in Minneapolis.

New York City has just elected a former police officer as its mayor who used the issue of crime and law and order as a winning issue in the campaign. People are tired of what the Democrats are force-feeding the American people.

The lessons should be screamingly obvious. The American people don't want Democrats' soft-on-crime agenda. Americans want safe communities. They want Democrats and all Americans to stop coddling criminals, to stand for public safety, and to stop this reckless Democrats' war on police.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

VOTING RIGHTS

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, the foundation of American democracy is built upon the sacred right to vote, and there is no doubt that right is under attack today.

This year alone, 550 voter suppression bills have been introduced in State legislatures across the country. In Texas, it is now illegal to compensate workers who help voters who don't speak English and for election officials to encourage eligible voters to apply to vote by mail.

In Fulton County, GA, a county that historically votes Democratic, the number of ballot boxes has been reduced from 38 to 8. That is one ballot box for every 100,000 voters.

And in Florida, ballot dropoff boxes can only be utilized during early voting hours, and boxes must be located at either a county's elections office or early voting sites.

Before President Trump, Republicans at least tried to pretend their laws weren't blatantly discriminatory, but now they aren't even attempting to hide the fact that they are purposefully trying to make it darn near impossible for Black people and other people of color, elderly individuals, students, working families, and people with disabilities to vote.

The fact that Republicans continue to claim that these voter suppression tactics are necessary to protect election integrity would be laughable if it weren't so deeply dangerous to our democracy. We all know that countless investigations have uncovered absolutely no evidence of systemic or widespread voter fraud. We all know that the 2020 election was the most secure election in our country's history. And we certainly all know this is not about voter fraud. It is about advancing a political agenda by denying large swaths of Americans their fundamental right to vote.

If this isn't un-American, I don't know what is, which is why voter suppression is the most urgent crisis facing our country today and which is why it is the single most pressing issue the Senate must address.

Yes, we need to pass Build Back Better, and we need to fight against attacks on a woman's right to make decisions about her own body, attacks on the LGBTQ community, attacks on unions, and much more because battles for rights that we thought we had won don't stay won. But we won't succeed in preserving these hard-won rights if we don't protect the right to vote.

To quote my friend and colleague Senator WARNOCK, "Voting rights are preservative of all other rights."

We are nearing the 1-year anniversary of the attack on the U.S. Capitol. This violent insurrection and mob violence was the direct result of blatant lies told by the former President and his supporters about systemic fraud and a stolen election.

We are still learning the consequences of what happened that day,

but we know for certain this act of domestic terrorism was an attack on free and fair elections in this country. Yet Republicans continue to spread the same lies about election fraud and continue to push through legislation at the State level to silence Americans across the country.

Congress must take action to restore the integrity of our voting system and make sure every American's voice is heard and counted. And we have tried. We have tried four times to stop these unconstitutional, State-level laws from undermining our elections.

We have tried to pass commonsense reforms that would, for example, allow all eligible voters to vote by mail; make election day a Federal holiday so all working families can vote; and establish Federal criminal penalties for deceiving voters with false and misleading information about voting.

And most importantly, we have tried to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would give the Department of Justice the tools to keep these blatant voter suppression laws from being enacted in the first place.

Only one Republican joined us in voting for this bill—the same bill that was being touted as bipartisan.

It is crystal clear by now that Republicans have absolutely no interest in protecting the right to vote. For Republicans, voter suppression and gerrymandering is their path to victory.

Democrats cannot sit back and allow a political party to maintain power by denying Americans their right to vote.

I want to quote Senator WARNOCK again. He said:

[A]s we cast that vote to begin addressing the debt ceiling, this same Chamber is allowing the ceiling of our democracy to crash in around us.

We figured out a way to save our economy; we can surely figure out a way to save our democracy.

Filibuster reform is the path Democrats need to take to fight back against the Republicans' all-out voter suppression assault on our democracy. I call on my Democratic colleagues to act.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

INFLATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, there are so many problems going on right now in the country. As I interact with people in Oklahoma, they are frustrated with where things are going with the economy. The rising inflation is literally inflation we have not seen for 40 years.

People who are 40 years old and younger have never experienced an economy like we are experiencing right now. But for those who lived during the time of Jimmy Carter, they all remember extremely well what it was like—what it was like to literally every single week when you go to the grocery store for prices to be higher, to be able to watch prices accelerate month after month after month.

The policies that have been put in place this year by the Biden administration and folks in this body have led directly to rampant inflation across our Nation and are causing a major problem.

The debt ceiling was voted on just days ago here in this body. It was \$2½ trillion. That \$2½ trillion has been set aside for the next 13 months or so.

There is an enormous gathering of debt. We continue to be able to see the inflation continue to rise. And in the middle of it is a conversation about this bill that is called Build Back Better.

Now, we haven't seen all the bill yet. It is 2,000-plus pages. But the pages change every week, and they have for weeks and weeks. We still have large sections of the bill that is being dropped out that just says: "We will add in more information here later."

But the sections that we do have, and that have been scored, there are major problems here. This is not just a Republican-Democrat conversation; this is the direction-of-the-country conversation. Is this really what we want to do and the direction that we want to go?

This bill—it was scored independently by CBO, looked at this bill and said if it looks out over 10 years with these policies in place, it would add \$3 trillion more in debt.

Now, as it is written, with all the budget gimmicks and everything in it, they say: Well, it actually will only add \$365 billion in debt—though the White House continues to claim that it is all paid for; it is all paid for; it is free; it is free; it is free.

The more we dig into it, the more problems we see. Some of those are philosophical changes. This bill changes what has been entitlements in the past. Entitlements have been connected to actually work to incentivize people to be able to work, knowing that people don't grow out of poverty by constantly getting government benefits. You are trapped in poverty. Work is what actually helps people escape out of poverty.

That is what Bill Clinton talked about often, about changing welfare as we know it. This bill actually changes it back to welfare as we knew it and shifts back entitlements to say you don't have to actually be working to receive all these government benefits. In fact, this bill even says you don't even have to be an American citizen to receive all these benefits; that if you are illegally present in the country, you get thousands and thousands of dollars in government benefits. If you are not working, but you are able to work and you choose not to, you get thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars in benefits.

I have to tell you, for the folks I know who leave for work at 6 a.m. and head to work, they are a little frustrated that their tax dollars are going to people still in bed, who are not engaging. But that is what this bill does;

it changes us from a situation where we incentivize work to we incentivize not working.

Part of that is in the child tax credit that is being discussed. I and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle voted to change the child tax credit for this year that was already in place, that already incentivizes work, that helps individuals with small children who need help. That has been in place in the Tax Code. In fact, Republicans also voted for that in the past with a work incentive.

That was changed in March of this year in a straight partisan vote. And it was done for a temporary basis because of COVID, to actually allocate dollars to families, regardless of if they are working or not during the time of COVID.

Now, the conversation is, that needs to be extended, not just through COVID but to just keep extending it, to take away the work requirements, to take away the requirement to be a citizen of the United States to receive these dollars, and to actually make it where you are getting a monthly check rather than just a tax incentive at the end of the year based on if you were working or not.

And the working requirement is not high. It is, literally, if you worked and earned \$2,500 in a year, you qualify for the tax credit. But they take away even that requirement for your family.

The childcare piece has been interesting because I have heard a lot of my Democratic colleagues talk about, well, we are going to give free childcare to folks.

The problem is—a multitude of issues with this. One is, if you are a faith-based entity for childcare, you are excluded from this, which about half of the childcare facilities around the country are provided by churches and faith-based nonprofits—rural and urban areas, they are all cut out.

The other challenge is, while they talk about free childcare, free childcare, free childcare, a very liberal think tank just did the math on this, what it would mean for middle-class families who actually do childcare at that same facility. Middle-class families who are paying right now for childcare would, after this bill is put in place—they estimate that it would cost \$13,000 more a year for childcare if you are not getting the subsidies.

So if you are getting the subsidies, it is free. If you are a dollar past the subsidies, you are going to pay \$13,000 more a year for your childcare.

I hope you are tracking the cost of natural gas as it is raised because it is about to go up again. If this bill—what I call the “Build Back Broke” bill—passes, the cost of natural gas and the cost of heating across America will go up because there is a new fee on methane.

I could go on and on and on with the issues that are in this bill that are content, that are philosophical issues, that are issues that affect people who live in

my State and will raise the cost for them.

Some people ask me: Who are the folks who actually like this bill?

Well, there are quite a few folks who like this bill. The folks who are in wealthy Democrat-run States, they love this bill because the wealthiest individuals in the highest tax States—and those are the blue States—the wealthiest individuals in the highest tax States, they get a huge tax break in this bill. For the wealthiest individuals, they get an \$80,000-a-year cut in their taxes, what they call State and local taxes. So if you are in New York or New Jersey or Illinois or in California and you are in the top 1 percent, you get an \$80,000 cut in your taxes. They like this bill.

Somebody else who likes this bill are the wealthy who actually buy electric vehicles—incredibly expensive, beautiful vehicles, many of them, but they get \$12,500 off of their vehicle based on this bill.

The environmental activists love this bill because billions of dollars actually go directly to these environmental activist groups. Many who were active in the Biden campaign, they get additional billions of dollars coming in. In fact, there are billions of dollars to create a new Civilian Climate Corps—a group of young people who will travel around the country actually promoting environmentalism, paid for with Federal tax dollars. They like this bill. Unions like this bill because, currently, if you donate to a nonprofit, you are able to take some of that off of your taxes. But under this bill, that goes away, and it is replaced with if you pay union dues, you get to write this off your taxes. So unions definitely like this bill.

And the folks who really, really like this bill—reporters and journalists. Reporters and journalists love this bill. So some of them are not talking about the content of this bill. The reason I say that, because this bill pays half the salary for reporters and journalists all over the country. This bill puts in place that half the salary of reporters and journalists in every city and every community across America will get half of their salary paid for by the Federal tax dollars.

Let’s see, government-paid reporters and journalists—what could go wrong with that?

There are a lot of issues in this bill. And as we talk through this bill, and as, thankfully, this bill is slowing down dramatically so that people are able to see the contents of this bill, I have more and more people who catch me and say: I have a major concern with this bill and, I have to tell you, I have had for months. And we continue to be able to speak out on issues that change the direction for our Nation that are actually built into this bill.

CHRISTMAS

Mr. President, it is the middle of December, and we are still hanging out in DC. We are actually past the date that

we were supposed to not be here any longer, according to our official calendar, but there is work to be done. And we continue to be able to do the work. It is a contentious body and, at times, a contentious nation.

I was with a group of folks yesterday for an early morning breakfast. And as we prayed together, one of them looked at me and said: I need a little “Prince of Peace” right now.

So can I just for a moment in this Chamber pause and just do a quick reminder of what is coming over the next couple of weeks, not about the heat of battle in this room but where we are in this season?

Reading from the Book of Isaiah, Isaiah 9:6 says: For a child will be born to us. A son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders, and His Name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. And there will be no end to the increase of this government or of his peace. It sounds like this in Luke, Chapter 2:

Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her first-born son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In the same region there were shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.” So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told to them.

A little peace on Earth will be helpful to this body and to our Nation on this day.

Merry Christmas to you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

ENSURING THAT GOODS MADE WITH FORCED LABOR IN THE XINJIANG UYGHUR AUTONOMOUS REGION OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA DO NOT ENTER THE UNITED STATES MARKET

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, we have come down to the floor multiple times in the last few weeks trying to push the passage of our bipartisan Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act.

For those who are not familiar with it at this point, it basically says that you can't import products into the United States that are made by slave labor in Xinjiang or entities that are associated with the government of that region. If you are a company that is manufacturing in that area, you need to prove that slaves didn't make it; the presumption is on you.

It is already illegal, by the way, to bring goods made with slave labor. It has been that way since the thirties. Yet it still happens, and we know it is happening at an alarming, horrific rate, with the genocide that we now witness being carried out by the Chinese Government in the Xinjiang region.

This bill, which we hope, here in a few moments, passes today, will head to the President and will become law, and it will help tremendously in stopping that from happening.

Many companies have already taken steps to clean up their supply chains, and, frankly, they should have no concerns about this law. Yet for those that have not done that, they will no longer be able to continue to make Americans—every one of us, frankly—unwitting accomplices in the atrocities and genocide that are being committed by the Chinese Communist Party.

As if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 6256, which was received from the House; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Reserving the right to object, first, let me thank the Senator from Florida for doing such great work, along with Senator MERKLEY and others, on this incredibly important piece of legislation. We are going to be able in a few moments to speak together, Republicans and Democrats, on our commitment to ending genocide in China.

I want to thank the Senator for working with me to make sure that, as part of his unanimous consent request, we are going to be able to make sure we have personnel in place to properly implement this policy. We have dozens of State Department and Department

of Defense nominees pending on this floor—more so than we have ever had at the end of a first-term, first-year Presidency—and we will, hopefully before we leave—we have to, before we leave, make substantial progress on this list in order to adequately protect our country.

At the very least, as we put forward this important new policy, it does make sense to accompany it and its passage with three key personnel who will be in charge of implementing it.

I believe we are going to be able to modify this request in the following manner. I would formally ask Senator RUBIO to modify this request that he has made to include the following request.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. MURPHY. I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, if applicable, at 4:30 p.m. today, the Senate proceed to the following nominations: Executive Calendar No. 525, R. Nicholas Burns, of Massachusetts, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the People's Republic of China; Calendar No. 626, Ramin Toloui, of Iowa, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (Economic and Business Affairs); and Calendar No. 619, Rashad Hussain, of Virginia, to be Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom; that there be 10 minutes for debate equally divided in the usual form on the nominations en bloc; that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Senate vote without intervening action or debate on the nominations in the order listed; that if the nominations are confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the modification?

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Mr. President, I have no objection to the modification.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the request, as modified?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 6256) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:52 p.m., recessed until 2 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. SCHATZ).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, this is Holly Durben from Shenandoah, IA.

Holly was someone who loved animals and loved nature. She was a people person. The thing that she loved most in the world was her family.

But tragically, Holly took her last breath on the morning of July 18, 2009. Brian Davis murdered her in a small farmhouse just south of Shenandoah. Holly is one of the hundreds of women murdered annually by a current or former intimate partner—nearly three women a day.

Americans are being devastated by a wave of violent crime. Night after night, folks turn on their local news and hear of yet another tragic story of murder, of rape, and violent crimes of all natures that are ravaging their community.

In October, the United States recorded its highest spike in homicides in modern history. Last year the murder rate in this country rose by 30 percent. These murders are not being committed by law-abiding citizens. They are being committed by extremely dangerous and violent criminals, like Brian Davis.

The reality is victims like Holly Durben and violent criminals like Brian Davis have been locked in homes together for nearly 2 years during this pandemic. Violent convicted criminals like Brian Davis, who murdered Holly, his fiancée, should not have access to firearms.

Law-abiding Americans need the ability to protect themselves from violent criminals like Brian Davis. Iowans are common sense. We are pragmatic. We take our Second Amendment rights incredibly serious. We value the safety of our communities, and we think it is right to punish violent criminals when they break the law and are convicted.

This isn't some crazy idea. Under current Federal law which has been on the books for decades and in State codes all across the country, there are violent crimes that result in consequences like the inability to possess a firearm. For example, someone convicted of a felony forfeits many of their rights. Felons can't be on a jury. They can't work for the Federal Government or serve in the military.

Felons, like murderers and drug kingpins, lose these rights when they commit and are convicted of their crimes. A fugitive from justice is not permitted to have a firearm; the same for those who are in this country illegally.

Under current law—current law—individuals who have been convicted of a misdemeanor domestic-violence crime are also on this list. As of today, if two individuals are married, the convicted abuser is held accountable, and that makes sense. But if they are not married, the convicted violent abuser is not held accountable.

I believe we need to get tough on crime, and I believe law-abiding gun owners in this country agree with me. Brian Davis, a violent, convicted criminal is not law abiding.

I want to be crystal clear about a few things. One, what we are talking about