

It isn't about the Capitol riot. Everyone agrees the Capitol riot was terrible and shouldn't have happened—I think most everyone does. But these are some of the same people who downplayed over 700 riots, thousands of cases of looting that happened in America in the summer of 2020.

It most certainly isn't about election laws that have been passed in the last year. They have been pushing these same bills with different titles and different names—they have been pushing all of this for the better part of a decade.

And it certainly isn't about voting rights. It is easier than it has ever been in the history of the United States to register to vote and to vote. And the proof is that in 2020, we had the highest turnout in over 100-and-something years. This isn't about any of that.

If you are paying attention, let me tell you what this is about. This is about power. It is about power. This is about changing the rules of the Senate so they have the power to ram through—to ram through—an election law. And this is about ramming through an election law to make sure that they never lose power, to make it easier to win elections for them and, therefore, have power for perpetuity.

You want to talk about defending democracy? Let's talk about the Americans, real people, who are afraid to donate to a political campaign, to put a bumper sticker on their car, to tell people who they voted for. They are afraid because they don't want to get canceled; they don't want to get boycotted; they don't want to get harassed—so they are afraid. They don't want to get smeared.

Do you want to talk about totalitarianism? Let's talk about the fact that the Attorney General of the United States has said let's go after some of these parents complaining at school boards and treat them as domestic terrorists.

And, listen, if you want to talk about segregation, then let's talk about a system of education that is both separate and unequal, divided between the people who can afford to spend \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year to send their kids to a fancy school where they get SAT tutoring and they get all kinds of advantages and the thousands—no, millions—of American parents who are Hispanic and African American and others who have no choice whatsoever as to where their kids go to school. They have no voice. They have to send their kid to the school the government tells them.

These people don't care about any of this because it is about power. It is not just the power to change election laws. We have seen it. It is about the power to tell you what you are allowed to say. It is about the power to tell you where you are allowed to go. It is about the power to tell you what you are allowed to do. It is about the power to intimidate, to destroy, to smear, to call a racist, a bigot, a hater anyone who

dares get in your way, anyone who dares disagree with you. It is about the power to do that.

Well, let me tell you something. I was raised by and have lived my entire life alongside people who lost their country, the country of their birth, to power-hungry people just like that.

I warn you, do not stand by and allow it to happen to this one.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

JANUARY 6

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I wish it were the case that everyone agrees that what happened here on January 6 was an abomination, but that is simply not true. That is simply not true. Many of my Republican colleagues will say the right things on the Senate floor—occasionally will whisper the right things to us when the cameras aren't watching. But a recent poll—a non-partisan Monmouth University poll—asked Republican voters whether or not they thought January 6 was a legitimate protest. And guess what. Half of Republican voters in this country say that the invasion of this Capitol that involved chants for the death of the Vice President, a gallows outside the U.S. Capitol—half of Republicans believe that that was a legitimate protest. Seven out of ten Republicans today don't believe that Joe Biden is the legitimate President. They believe that Donald Trump won the election, despite the fact that he lost by 7 million votes.

And the reason for that is mostly that the leader of the Republican Party, Donald Trump, has been legitimizing violence, urged those protests and that insurrection attempt, cheered them at the end of the day on January 6, and also because we have seen mostly silence from mainstream Republicans who know better but don't want to pick a fight with President Trump.

So, yes, we are worried about the future of our Republic. We are worried about the future of our Republic because a mainstream political party has gotten behind the idea that power matters more than elections; that violence is a legitimate means of protest.

So this idea that everybody agrees that January 6 was an abomination just isn't true. It is not true, and that is, in part, why we are so worried.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. President, I want to talk about two subjects today, and the first is this question of the rules of the Senate because I have listened with great interest over the last few days as my Republican colleagues have come down to the floor to extol the virtues of Senate tradition. They explained the danger of changing the rules so that the majority vote in the Senate can pass legislation.

It doesn't sound like a radical idea; that if the majority of Senators want a piece of legislation to pass, it should pass. But this idea that the filibuster is part of the original design of our democracy or our Senate or that the cur-

rent use of the filibuster is consistent with Senate tradition is just not true.

Our Founding Fathers—yes, they built a system of government that was designed to make rapid change, even change supported by the majority of voters, really, really hard to implement.

They designed two different legislative Chambers, the President with veto power, staggered terms for Senators, but our Founding Fathers considered a supermajority requirement for legislation in the Congress, and they rejected it as too great a limitation on the will of the people.

Now, admittedly, at the time of our founding, there were other checks on the voters' will being quickly transformed into policy changes. Back then, for instance, only White men could vote. The citizenry at the time wasn't even trusted to directly elect the Members of this body. But in the decades that followed, the American people demanded more democracy, and they got it.

Why? Because as our grand experiment of democracy continues, we saw proof of concept. The people could be trusted to govern themselves. They could choose leaders who were more able, more honest, more effective than any King or Queen or Sultan or Emperor.

So we extended the franchise universally. We decided to have the Senate be directly elected, and as America expanded, the new States out in the West, they gobbled up even more democracy. The West decided to elect not just legislators but judges and prosecutors, dog catchers and insurance commissioners. The majoritarian rule, as America grew, became addictive, and as our country grew, our citizens demanded more of it.

Now, in the context of the Founders' intentions and the long-term trend toward more democracy, this 60-vote requirement, this supermajority requirement in the Senate, which doesn't exist in any other high-income democracy—it stands out like a sore, rotting thumb. This anti-majoritarian drain clog is designed intentionally to stop the majority of Americans from getting what they want from government because that is what it is.

Why should it not be up to the voters and not politicians to decide the laws of this Nation?

With a 60-vote threshold, that decision is robbed from voters. Given that only one-third of the Senate is up for election every 2 years, it is just impossible for voters on their own to move one party from, say, 46 or 48 Members of this body to 60 Members in one election, and we all know this.

But right now the American public is in no mood for the choices of elites to be continually substituted for their collective judgment. Right now, Americans are in a pretty revolutionary mood, and you can understand why. More Americans today than at any time in recent history see themselves

on the precipice of financial and spiritual ruin. So why on Earth would our message amidst this growing populous tempest be to tell voters that rules are required to protect them from their bad judgment, to take from them purposely the ability to change policies whenever and however they wish?

Now, Senate Republicans will say that even though the filibuster is anti-majoritarian—right, it is. It says that even if the public installs a majority in the Senate that wants policy A, the rules are going to be constructed in the Senate to prevent it from happening. Senate Republicans will say that even though it is anti-majoritarian, it is for good reason because, as I have heard many of my colleagues say, it promotes compromise.

Well, I have been in the Senate now for 8, 9 years. Once in a blue Moon, like this summer on the infrastructure bill, there is a big bipartisan achievement. But anyone who believes that the rules of the Senate right now incentivizes bipartisanship should just watch the Senate for, like, a few days.

Today, the 60-vote threshold just allows the minority to sit back and say, no, no, no, over and over again, in large part, because its usage has changed so much. It didn't used to be that the filibuster, the 60-vote threshold, was applied to everything.

Up until the 1970s, cloture votes were almost nonexistent in the Senate. Big things routinely passed with 50 votes. Think about this. In 1994, Senator FEINSTEIN forced a vote here on one of the most controversial topics that we could talk about—a ban on assault weapons. It received, in 1994, fewer votes than did the Manchin-Toomey background checks bill 30 years later. But the assault weapons ban, arguably way more controversial than the background checks bill, passed and became law while the background checks bill didn't. Why? Because in 1994, many important votes, even the assault weapons ban, were allowed to proceed on a majority-vote basis.

That all changed, mostly when Democrats won the Senate in 2007, and Barack Obama was elected President. But no matter who started this policy of applying the 60-vote threshold to everything, today both parties use it. Democrats used it when we were in the minority.

The practice of the filibuster doesn't jibe with this clarion call of adhering to Senate tradition because Senate tradition is not to use the 60-vote threshold on everything. Let's be honest. We are not going back to a world in which Senators self-regulate the filibuster. And there is no sign that the claim the filibuster is an incentive for bipartisanship is going to suddenly become true.

Today, millions of voters are wondering why they vote to change the people who get elected but then nothing actually changes.

We should have a better answer than just Senate tradition.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, President Biden's decision to remove our remaining troops from Afghanistan was the right one, no question about it.

President Trump set the Biden administration up for failure. Trump's agreement with the Taliban committed us to withdrawing all of our troops, and had Biden torn up that agreement, he would have had to send tens of thousands of troops into Afghanistan to push back the Trump-era Taliban gains. The American public would not have supported another Afghanistan troop surge and for good reason. The overnight collapse of the Afghan Army and Government was, frankly, proof that 20 years of nation building had failed, and another 20 years wasn't going to result in a different outcome.

President Biden made the right decision to leave. The American people, by a large margin, support that decision.

But right now we need to be honest. The question of what to do now, as Afghanistan crumbles into a nightmarish failed state, is a moral knot almost impossible to untangle.

As chair of the Foreign Relations subcommittee that oversees Afghanistan policy, I thought a lot about this question, and I have come to a few conclusions that I want to share quickly with my colleagues.

First, let's just take a minute to talk about what it is like to be living in Afghanistan right now. It is a nightmare. Once the U.S. military occupation and all the foreign aid that came with it disappeared, the Afghanistan economy collapsed, predictably.

Today, winter is setting in, and more than half of the population—23 million people—don't have enough food to eat. By this summer, 97 percent of Afghans will be living below the poverty line, trying to survive on less than \$2 a day. With 9 million people just one step away from famine, this humanitarian crisis could kill more Afghans than the past 20 years of war.

And herein lies the quandary. On one side is what sounds like a pretty clear and convincing argument. Essentially, the Taliban has to own this. We warned the Taliban that this collapse would occur if they took the nation by force. That is why we sat at a table with them and tried to explain that it was in their best interests and the best interests of the nation for the Taliban to share power with the elected Afghan Government.

But the Taliban did not listen. They took Kabul and should own the results. To send billions to solve the humanitarian crisis they caused would be to bail the Taliban out and incentivize other insurgent groups to make similar, rash decisions.

But on the other hand is an equally clear and convincing argument.

We stood by the Afghan people for two decades—protecting them, working with them. We spent hundreds of billions of dollars helping to raise up the future of millions Afghan families,

women, and girls. And now those same Afghans, those same families, the ones who, frankly, have nothing to do with the Taliban are dying, potentially, by the tens of thousands. And we have the power to do something about it. How could we let the Afghan people die needlessly if we have the power to stop it?

Now, we possess this power because it is U.S. policy toward the Taliban government that is contributory toward this crisis. It is not the proximate cause, but it is contributory. When Kabul fell suddenly last August, the administration sensibly froze \$7 billion of the former Afghan Government's assets that are held at the Federal Reserve that we didn't want the Taliban to control. But that money isn't ours; it rightfully belongs to the Afghan people. Further, our sanctions on the Taliban—completely justified because of the Taliban's embrace of terrorism—essentially handcuffs the Afghan economy and therefore contributes to the country's economic descent. So we need to understand that our policies are contributing to the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

But what if these two points—that the Taliban should own this and that we can't stand by, idly, while people die—what if they aren't in 100-percent contrast? What if we could help the Afghan people without directly empowering the Taliban? Wouldn't that be the best possible answer?

The good news is, is that the middle road is possible. I am going to be honest. It is not easy, but it is possible.

Over the last 20 years, the United States has spent billions in our taxpayer dollars to build schools and health clinics and a robust civil service. The number of schools today, for instance, is five times higher in Afghanistan than it was in 2001. That is because of American investment.

We can and we should find ways to pay the salaries of those who work at these nonpolitical institutions through the U.N. and NGOs on the ground, going around the Taliban-led government to keep those essential services running and to inject some much needed money into the economy. Again, this isn't easy to do, but it is worthwhile given the stakes.

We can also support the U.N. directly. Yesterday, the U.N. asked for a \$4.5 billion call in humanitarian aid to stave off catastrophe in Afghanistan. This is the largest single-country appeal in history. That should tell you about the scale of the crisis that we are facing. It is larger than what we see in Syria or Yemen or Ethiopia.

I support the administration's decision to dedicate an additional \$308 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan. That money can help save lives. But Congress should authorize more.

Make no mistake, the Taliban and, frankly, 20 years of corrupt Afghan Government do own this debacle. The choices they made have led to this day.