

Senate. This is the kind of bill that we should be working on if we want to help alleviate our inflation situation and improve the economy.

I was dismayed to see that the President's budget, which was released this week, would double down on the kind of excessive government spending that helped get us into this inflation crisis in the first place. After a year of progressively worsening inflation, you would think Democrats would have learned their lesson, but, clearly, the President is still intent on more reckless spending, coupled, I might add, with job-killing tax hikes—and not just any tax hikes. According to Bloomberg, the President's budget would add up to being the largest tax hike in American history in dollar terms.

I hope that my Democratic colleagues here in Congress will decide to skip the President's irresponsible tax-and-spending proposals and focus on measures that would actually help alleviate this inflation crisis, not make it worse.

While there is no easy fix for our inflation situation, we can start to make things better for Americans with bipartisan legislation like the Ocean Shipping Reform Act. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will support the legislation Senator KLOBUCHAR and I have produced.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESTAURANT REVITALIZATION FUND

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I met with restaurant owners from all over my State last month—from Seattle to Yakima, to Spokane—and we talked about the American Rescue Plan and how important that was and how that bill made recovery possible for so many restaurants in our State—but not for everyone, and that is why I am on the Senate floor today.

The American Rescue Plan was absolutely a lifeline. It designated more than \$28 billion to establish a Restaurant Revitalization Fund that gave restaurant owners the financial support they needed to keep their doors open, to rehire workers, and to deal with the continued effects of COVID-19.

More than 3,500 Washington State businesses have received over \$9 billion in Federal loans and grants and debt relief since the start of the pandemic. That is not even considering the flexible dollars that we provided local governments to help local small businesses. Now, that really made a difference and helped a lot of folks keep their doors open and their employees on the payroll, but for many restaurant

owners, the funds were gone before they were able to get the same relief their neighbors got.

I don't think it is right that a business on one side of the street in Seattle got Federal dollars from the Restaurant Revitalization Fund but another mom-and-pop shop just next-door and just as qualified—that also got approved—didn't get the money because the funds ran dry.

Now, I know this is true for communities in red States and in blue States—that our restaurants are often the heart of a community. They serve their local favorites that remind us of home. They sponsor our sports teams and community causes. They allow us to get together and share a meal and celebrate with family and friends and make memories. Making these businesses whole is critical for our economy, but it is essential to preserving what makes Seattle “Seattle” or Spokane “Spokane.”

I know many of my Republican colleagues feel the same way. So I want us to look at every possible option to replenish the Restaurant Revitalization Fund and get help to every restaurant that applied and got approved but didn't get the same help as everyone else.

We have got good bipartisan bills to get this done. Our legislation would help hard-to-reach businesses and communities apply for the assistance because I really want to make sure we are helping actual small businesses, not giant corporations that don't need it.

Any Senator who has spoken to local restaurant owners knows they are dealing, still, with really tough challenges right now: increased costs from inflation and shortages of everything from straws to chicken wings, and it is not easy to find wait staff and cooks and a lot more. That is why it is so urgent that we get a bipartisan small business relief package—that makes our restaurants whole—over the finish line as soon as possible. So let's do whatever we need to do to get this done and keep our restaurants open.

CORONAVIRUS

Now, Mr. President, everyone here knows how strongly I feel that we get a COVID supplemental passed as soon as possible. We do not know when the next variant might come or how bad it could be. We don't want to end up in the same position as before, when we did not have enough tests or vaccines or therapeutics. We all know we have to get funding for a COVID supplemental passed and soon.

So let's get both of these passed together to make sure we are doing everything to keep every part of our economy up and running and so that this administration has what it needs to fund every other tool that we know will keep restaurants open, keep our schools open, and every other part of our communities.

I feel strongly that we need to pass both of those bills. So let's get them

done together, and let's get it done as soon as possible. Let's keep America healthy and our restaurants open for business.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we have some rare good news on the public health front. COVID cases are down at the lowest level since July. Crucially, hospitalizations and deaths are also down dramatically, more than 70 percent lower than they were in January during the Omicron wave. Compared to just a few months ago, our Nation is experiencing far less suffering and death, thank goodness.

But despite the progress we have made, COVID continues to be a threat. Every day, 800 American families lose a loved one to COVID—800 a day—and catch new infections, which present an opportunity for the virus to mutate.

We are at a turning point in this fight against COVID. Now, we need to strengthen our healthcare system. We need to stay a step ahead of this deadly virus. That is especially true since the subvariant of Omicron—BA.2, as it is known—has become dominant in America.

Remember the frenzy last holiday season when we were running from pharmacy to pharmacy trying to find rapid tests for our families or waiting in the freezing cold for hours on end to get a PCR test? Why would we ever want to be caught flatfooted again? We need to sustain our public health funding so that our hospitals and healthcare professionals have the equipment and tools they need to keep us safe.

The one thing dramatically worse than returning to the dark days of COVID-19 and the deadly variants would be to return unprepared. If we want to keep our masks off—and I do—if we want to keep our kids in school—and I do—and our businesses open, we need to make smart investments in America's capacity to confront future strains of these variants. We can't continue this cycle of neglect and panic. These pendulum swings harm our health system and contribute to unnecessary costs and suffering.

Congress must come together on a bipartisan basis. And shouldn't we all agree on this: that we move as a nation in the same direction? That means providing funding to purchase new booster doses, including those which the FDA authorized this week for adults over the age of 50. I got mine yesterday morning. If we don't purchase these vaccines now ahead of time, then we

will be sleepwalking into the next deadly wave.

We also need to ensure that as soon as the FDA authorizes a vaccine for kids under the age of 5, parents can get their kids protected as soon as possible.

Funding also is needed for oral antivirals and other therapeutics to treat patients who contract a serious case of COVID. These treatments will keep our hospitals from being overwhelmed.

And we need funding to maintain the testing infrastructure we have built up over the last several months, like President Biden's successful program to put up to 1 billion—billion—rapid tests right at the doors of every American who wants one.

The fact is, Congress should have already provided funding for these life-saving resources, but we still haven't done it. This lack of funding has already hit my home State of Illinois. Last week, shipments of monoclonal antibody treatments to our State were scaled back 35 percent to preserve the supply. Also last week, thanks to a lack of funds, the Department of Health and Human Services announced they would no longer pay hospitals and health clinics for testing they have provided to 30 million uninsured Americans.

Several free community-based testing sites and pharmacies in Illinois are now closing up. The money is running dry. At one community health center in Illinois, one-third of the patients are uninsured. That clinic has received more than \$150,000 to test, treat, and vaccinate the patients—money well spent not just to protect these patients but every Illinoisan. If Congress doesn't provide new funding, that health center may be forced to close for good.

All of us want to keep the masks off for good and move past this coronavirus, but to think we can just wish away COVID forever would be naive, irresponsible, and fiscally unwise.

I urge my Republican colleagues to join in a bipartisan effort to provide new funding for our COVID preparation response efforts. Let's be ready for whatever this virus might bring.

TRIBUTE TO DR. JASMINE HUNT DIMITRIOU

Mr. President, finally, I want to take a special moment to thank a member of my staff who is leaving on a new assignment.

History tells us there have been some extraordinary African-American women in the field of science. Dr. Alice Ball was a chemist who developed the first successful treatment for leprosy. Dr. Patricia Bath was an ophthalmologist who invented something called the laserphaco probe, a tool used in cataract surgery. Dr. Shirley Jackson was a theoretical physicist and former Chair of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

What did they all have in common? They were African-American women

who broke barriers and improved the lives of countless others, and they didn't get the public recognition they deserved.

Well, let me add another name to that list. Her name is Dr. Jasmine Hunt Dimitriou. Dr. Hunt—known as Jasmine in our office—joined my staff in 2010 on an American Association for the Advancement of Science fellowship. She was a newly minted Ph.D. in chemistry who had just graduated from the University of California at Santa Barbara.

The fellowship in my office lasted a year, but thank goodness she liked it so she stayed. We persuaded her to stay longer and devote more than 10 years of her life to public service.

Over the years, Jasmine climbed the office ranks from fellow to lead policy adviser for science, energy, and environment, to legislative director.

Today is her last day in the Senate. She is leaving to take on a new challenge as Deputy Chief of Staff to Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm.

I know I speak for my entire staff when I say that we are thrilled for her. This is a well-deserved recognition and opportunity. I hate to lose her, but I never want to stand in the path of my staff if they have got a chance to promote themselves and to use their talents more effectively. We are going to miss her.

Jasmine grew up in Normal, IL, which is perfect because she is about as normal and stable a person as you will ever find. No matter how long the hours or how tumultuous the mood, she is always clear-headed and calm.

Her mother loved libraries and passed that love along to Jasmine and her brother Joseph. Thankfully, Jasmine remains a voracious reader and learner.

I don't know which is more complicated, understanding how to split an atom or how a bill becomes a law, but Jasmine has mastered both. During her years in the Senate, Jasmine and her husband Mike became parents to two of the cutest little girls. She also has been something of a mother figure to countless young members of my staff whose careers she nurtured.

Now she will bring her leadership for the Nation to the Department of Energy. I have no doubt that, in little time, she will manage to stop climate change with a Thanos snap. She is a remarkable scientist and public servant. I want to thank her for devoting so much of her time and talent to help me, to help the State of Illinois, and to serve this Nation.

Jasmine, best of luck.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

NOMINATION OF JUDITH DELZOPPO PRYOR

Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the nomination of Judith Pryor to serve as First Vice President of the Ex-Im Bank of the United States. Now, the Ex-Im Bank was established to help U.S. exporters by providing financing to foreign buyers of U.S. products.

I have always been very skeptical about the merits of this mission, and I remain skeptical to this day. Ex-Im claims that it only takes risks that private lenders are unable or unwilling to take. That is a central message of the Ex-Im Bank.

We should stop ourselves right there and ask ourselves a question: If private lenders are unwilling or unable to take a particular risk, why should taxpayers be forced to take that risk?

And, at the same time, Ex-Im also claims it only makes safe bets. Mr. President, that is a complete contradiction. It is impossible to do both. Ex-Im can't only take transactions so risky that no one else will do them and, at the same time, only be doing safe transactions. It doesn't make any sense at all.

The fact is, Ex-Im wins business by systematically underpricing risk. That is why borrowers go to Ex-Im instead of any number of private institutions that wouldn't offer deals on the same terms that Ex-Im offers. That is why our largest banks go to Ex-Im for loan guarantees. The Ex-Im terms are too good to be true—at least too good to be true in the private sector. And that is evident by the kinds of transactions that Ex-Im approves.

Consider just last year: Ex-Im financed a deal guaranteeing an \$82 million loan from JPMorgan to Qantas airline for the purpose of buying jets made by General Electric. Now, let's think about this. JPMorgan is the largest bank in America, one of the largest banks in the world. Qantas is the largest airline in Australia. And General Electric is one of the largest industrial companies in the world.

Why did these companies need the American taxpayer to subsidize a deal among the three of them? The obvious answer is they don't. These are some of the biggest, most sophisticated companies in the world, and they have complete access to global capital markets every day of the week. They didn't turn to Ex-Im because they were unable to secure private financing. They turned to Ex-Im because they got a better deal than they would get in a strictly private transaction.

Now, as if that isn't galling enough, Ex-Im has now decided that American markets can't meet our domestic financing needs—purely domestic. I remind you, the U.S. capital markets are the largest, deepest, most sophisticated capital markets in the world by far. Anyone with a bright idea and a business plan can raise capital in the United States. They do it every day.

According to the Securities and Exchange Commission's Office of Small Business Capital Formation report for fiscal year 2021—last year—there were \$2.2 trillion in private offerings of debt and equity and \$1.7 trillion in initial public offerings and other registered securities. So that is almost \$4 trillion of capital markets activities in the United States. That is how big our capital markets are.