

and that it would go away and mysteriously disappear. But now that we have crossed this tragic threshold, we must take stock of where we are and where we are headed.

More than 2 years into this pandemic, COVID is still a threat to America and the world. In fact, infections nationwide are up 50 percent over the past 2 weeks. Hospitalizations are up 20 percent. That is the case in Illinois as well as our neighbors in the region. The Commonwealth of Kentucky, home of Minority Leader McCONNELL, had the highest COVID death rate in the country over the past week.

The one thing worse than being swamped with another wave of COVID cases is being caught unprepared. Right now, we are sleepwalking into the next potentially deadly wave, and we know the virus will continue to mutate and pose threats. We need to learn from our 2 years of experience with Delta and Omicron and act now and be ready, be prepared.

Over the weekend, the Biden administration warned that new subvariants could fuel a wave that is forecast to infect 100 million Americans—almost a third of our population—over this fall and winter. Yet last week, Health and Human Services Secretary Becerra testified to the Senate Appropriations Committee: “[B]ut in order to be ready for that, we have to start purchasing today.” That is what Secretary Becerra said. If we wait for the surge to hit, it is too late.

Last week, it also was reported that the administration will run out of COVID vaccines by September 1 if the FDA authorizes second boosters for all adults. How can America be caught in this situation again—even with vaccines—unprepared?

Because Federal funding has dried up to reimburse hospitals and health centers for testing, we don't have a complete picture of how many new infections are actually showing up. The University of Washington estimates the true number of infections is five times higher than official reports.

So the alarm bells are ringing, and a looming vaccine crisis is right around the corner. Other countries in the world get it. They understand it. They are racing ahead of us to secure supplies of vaccines, but because of resistance from Republicans in Washington, we are not doing that.

So why won't the Senate act to pass this COVID legislation—obviously necessary legislation—right now? It was more than a month ago that Senators Schumer and Romney, together with half-a-dozen bipartisan Senators, announced a \$10 billion emergency COVID package. It is not everything we want; it is not everything we need; but it is an urgent measure that seeks to address the crisis.

Instead of just getting this done, politics were inserted. There were demands for amendments or else. The process broke down. Instead of getting the job done, Republicans are playing

politics. They are demanding poison pill riders on issues unrelated, like immigration.

With summer approaching, Americans are eager to keep the face masks off for good and move past the pandemic. I get it. Everybody wants the kids back in school. They want them home for vacation. They want to take family vacations. They want to go out to dinner—all things that are part of the joy of life. I share the sentiment, but we have to deal with the reality of this virus. It is changing every day, and it has surprised us so many times before.

Even the most persuasive political speech isn't going to change the course of this virus. Rather than reacting to whatever deadly curve ball gets thrown at us next, we must be ready beforehand with the right tools to keep us moving in the right direction. I don't want to come to the floor to mark 1½ million dead Americans or 2 million dead Americans due to the virus.

The time to provide additional funding is not now; it was weeks ago. It is incredible to me that, after what this Nation has gone through—1 million dead Americans—we are still debating over whether we should be prepared for the next stage of the virus. Shame on the politicians who are inserting politics into a life-and-death debate.

Without this funding, we could very well lose the progress we have made in containing COVID. We cannot tolerate that sort of setback, especially at this pivotal moment where continued progress puts us on the cusp of what we dreamed of 2 years ago: finally putting an end to this pandemic, finally returning to normal.

While Senate Democrats and the Biden administration have taken tremendous strides with getting shots in arms, supporting local businesses, and getting our kids back in school, we still have a lot to do.

To my Republican colleagues: Drop the political antics. Join us in making this responsible investment to save lives and prevent the pandemic from once again spinning out of control. We know a new wave could be coming, and we need to sit down and face this public health issue for the reality that it is.

Let's not waste time with irrelevant, anti-immigrant rhetoric. Let's do something that helps the American people and work together to drive America's recovery forward.

PROTESTS

Madam President, we had a meeting of the Senate Judiciary Committee this morning, and the committee discussed at the outset threats that have been reported against judges, Justices, their families, and their homes. This committee has responded with a bill—a bipartisan bill—by Senators Cornyn and Coons to provide more security protection for the Supreme Court. I fully endorse it, and I am glad that it passed unanimously. It should have.

There have been complaints this week about demonstrations in front of

the homes of Justices and others. I have made my position clear. I think that such demonstrations are totally unnecessary, unwise, and should be discouraged. In some cases, they are reprehensible.

The pressure that is trying to be applied on these officials by protesters, whether they are for or against a certain issue, are just unacceptable. I stand by that position, and I believe that Democrats and Republicans agree that we have to be serious about protecting those who are elected to public office at every level from harassment, intimidation, and, above all, from any violence.

I condemn those attacks on anti-abortion organizations in two States: Wisconsin and Oregon. The fire-bombing that took place in one—that is unacceptable. Violence is never acceptable in a democracy.

Having said that, I beg my Republican colleagues to show some consistency. I was here January 6, 2021, when this insurrectionist mob, inspired by President Trump, came up, crashed down the windows and floors into this Capitol, and marched on this Chamber. I was on the floor of the U.S. Senate when we were advised by the Capitol Police to evacuate as quickly as possible to save our own lives. I was in this building when several of the Capitol Police stepped up and showed dramatic heroism. Some of them lost their lives as a result of it.

Five to seven people died on January 6, 2021, as a result of what happened that day. A hundred and fifty law enforcement officials were attacked. And how did the Republicans respond to that? Senator McCONNELL personally stopped any effort at a bipartisan commission to determine what caused that attack and how to avoid it in the future. He personally came to the floor and objected. I heard him do it.

The only investigation that has taken place is in the Democratic House of Representatives and, thank goodness, several Republican Congressmen and women have stepped forward.

I want to salute from my own State Republican Congressman ADAM KINZINGER. He joined this bipartisan effort to investigate January 6, 2021. He is retiring now. He paid a heavy price for his decision, but it was a principled decision. I respect him for it.

The same with Congresswoman LIZ CHENEY. We probably don't agree on half a dozen issues, but I have to tell you, I admire her and respect her courage for stepping up and saying she wanted the investigation in the House to be bipartisan and, therefore, she was going to be part of the panel. I respect her very much for that.

Next month, we are going to have public hearings in the House of Representatives on this issue. We should have had a bipartisan commission looking at January 6, 2021, but Senator McCONNELL and Republicans stopped it.

What did the Republican National Committee say in the official release

about the January 6, 2021, insurrectionist mob that crashed through the Capitol here, desecrating it, endangering the lives of innocent people—what did they say about it? They called it “legitimate political discourse”—legitimate political discourse—with five to seven people dead and 150 police officers assaulted. That is illegitimate; that is unacceptable, whether the intended victims were Members of Congress or the victims today are members of the Supreme Court.

Have the good sense, I say to my Republican colleagues, to be consistent. If you are opposed to violence and believe it is unacceptable in a democratic society, make that standard apply whether the victims are in one branch of the government or another. It is absolutely unacceptable in both.

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.

DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, if Democrats have made one thing clear over the past 16 months, it is that they think that the Federal Government—or maybe just Democrats—knows best. It is evident in just about everything they do. And there is pretty much no end to the things they think the Federal Government should be in charge of—healthcare, childcare, education, elections, and the list goes on.

Take the current debate over abortion. There is one thing Democrats are clearly terrified of is putting this issue in the hands of the American people. Overturning *Roe v. Wade* would return the issue of abortion back to the people and their elected representatives. Democrats are keen to make sure that doesn't happen, probably because they know the American people are not in agreement with Democrats' extreme abortion agenda.

And so the news that the Supreme Court might overturn *Roe* and return the issue of abortion to people has been met with hysteria from Democrats. More than one has responded by calling for packing the Supreme Court so the Democrats can ensure they get the abortion decisions they desire.

Of course, yesterday, Democrats responded to the Supreme Court's pending decision by holding a vote on what has to be the most extreme abortion legislation ever considered by the U.S. Congress—a bill that would rip away even the smallest protections for the unborn and make abortion-on-demand, at any time, for essentially any reason, the law of the land.

Meanwhile, today, the Senate Budget Committee is holding a hearing on a favorite Democratic proposal—putting the Democrats in charge of Americans'

healthcare. Under Medicare for All, Americans can look forward to a future in which the government decides what healthcare Americans can access and what medications and procedures will be covered.

Never mind the nearly 180 million Americans who have access to health insurance through their jobs, many of whom are satisfied with their coverage. No, that coverage would be decimated in favor of Democrats' preferred “one size fits all” approach. I am not sure what Democrats have seen that makes them think government can efficiently run healthcare. Maybe they never had to deal with the IRS.

Oh, and let's not forget about the part where it has been projected that this government-run system could cost taxpayers more than \$30 trillion. So what is the problem with that attitude the Democrats have? Why should all of us be concerned by the fact Democrats think the Federal Government—or maybe just the Democratic Party—knows best?

For starters, it is clearly apparent that government does not always know best. Take our current inflation crisis. A big reason we are currently dealing with the worst inflation in 40 years is the Democrats' decision to flood the economy with unnecessary government money with their American Rescue Plan spending spree.

This legislation was billed as critical COVID relief that was going to help families and our economy recover. Instead, it helped plunge our economy into a massive inflation crisis that has left individuals and families struggling to afford necessities like gas and food.

To give another example, the President's Department of Homeland Security recently created a so-called Disinformation Governance Board. And the individual who has been chosen to head up this disinformation board is someone who, herself, has been a purveyor of online disinformation, as well as being hostile to what she apparently considers excessive free speech. Yet, apparently, the Biden administration thinks we should trust her to rule on disinformation.

Of course, this is not to say that we should distrust every move the government makes or whether the government can never do anything good. Assuming the government always knows best is to vastly overestimate the government's abilities. The Federal Government, like society, is made up of flawed human beings. Being a Member of Congress or a Presidential administration does not come anywhere close to conferring infallibility.

Another big problem with “Democrats' knows best” attitude is it usually involves a plan for government to take over ever-greater areas of American life. More government control usually involves less individual freedom.

Take the childcare plan Democrats included in their Build Back Better legislation. First, of course, Democrats

take the opportunity to add a lot of new childcare mandates and regulations. But more than that, Democrats' government subsidy program is set up to favor certain kinds of childcare and childcare providers. It is set 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 more than half 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.

Democrats obviously think childcare is better conducted in secular, institutional settings, so they set up their legislation to favor that kind of childcare, no matter—no matter—what parents actually prefer.

That is pretty much par for the course for Democrats, of course, who have made it very clear that they have their doubts as to whether parents are the best decisionmakers for their children.

Who can forget the Democrat candidate for Governor of Virginia who memorably said:

I'm not going to let parents come into schools and actually take books out and make their own decision . . . I don't think parents should be telling schools what they should teach.

This is a view that President Biden seemed to echo just days ago. I would love to hear the reasons why Democrats think government can make better decisions for children than parents who know their children as individuals and raise them and love them.

But to get back to my main point here. The childcare program in Democrats' tax-and-spending spree is a perfect example of what happens when government starts taking over. The government, instead of the individual, starts making decisions. The more substantial the government involvement, the larger the government's role in decision making is likely to be.

Again, that is not to say that the government has no role to play in American life. We need the Federal Government. Our national defense, for example, is most practically handled at the Federal level. But the Federal Government should be and is meant to be limited.

And allowing the government to take over ever-larger aspects of American life—whether it is childcare, healthcare, or anything else—is a recipe for the loss of individual liberty.

Finally, Democrats' “government knows best” attitude is a problem because, as we have clearly seen, it quickly leads to an attitude of “Democrats know best,” which quickly leads to pushing for special privileges for Democrats.

Take recent conflicts involving the Supreme Court. Democrats have made it abundantly clear that they believe the only legitimate Supreme Court is a Supreme Court that hands down decisions in line with Democrats' policy