

our neighbors when the going gets tough. And the going can get tough. But, in Murdo, we knew that if a roof collapsed under the weight of snow or a windstorm came through and wiped out a barn or we lost a friend or family member, the whole community would rally around to help.

Small-town life has a beautiful simplicity. On summer nights, my dad would take us to get ice cream cones, and then we would drive down to the White River. We would roll down the windows and feel the breeze and watch the sun drop below the horizon—no staring at iPhones or checking likes on social media.

Those were idyllic evenings. Moments like those kept us connected to what really mattered: our family, our community, the land. Mr. President, the values I saw reflected growing up in Murdo are reflected in towns all across our State. In Murdo, I learned the character of South Dakotans, the work ethic, the commitment to freedom coupled with the belief in personal responsibility and the sense of responsibility to the broader community.

Agriculture, of course, is the life-blood of South Dakota, and it is a hard way of life. It is backbreaking work in all weathers, always with the risk that all your work can be wiped out in moments by a storm.

Anyone who grows up on a farm or ranch knows that everybody has to pull their weight or the farm or ranch just don't survive. And I think that grounding in agriculture has helped give South Dakotans their reputation for having a strong work ethic and a commitment to getting the job done.

And I am not kidding about that reputation. As a Senator, I have traveled to a number of places around the world, and I regularly meet people—often military members—who talk about the work ethic of the South Dakotans they know. I am pretty sure it is that work ethic and sense of personal responsibility that is responsible for the fact that South Dakota has always punched above its weight when it comes to military service, as well as the patriotism that runs strongly through the South Dakota character.

South Dakotans cherish their freedoms, and they also believe that with freedom comes responsibility. And they have a deep appreciation for the Founders' vision that has allowed us to enjoy such freedom and for the sacrifices that have been required to secure it. With that comes an expectation that each generation has to do its part to pay freedom's price and protect all that we have been given.

The South Dakota values I learned growing up helped shape my political philosophy: my belief that government should be limited and that it is best when it is closest to the people; and that if a matter can be handled at the State or local level, it should be; that the legacy of the past is something to be cherished and preserved while leaving, at the same time, room for change

and adaptation when needed; that freedom is a sacred gift, one that must be defended, and that with freedom comes responsibility; and, finally, that while government is necessary, government is not where we should look for salvation.

Mr. President, the legacy of growing up in South Dakota is a precious one. We didn't have much money, but we were very rich in the things that mattered. And I am deeply grateful for those years in Murdo, for the teachers and coaches and others in the community who invested in me, and for everyone who continues to make it feel like home and for the privilege of living in the Mount Rushmore State.

It is my very great honor to represent the people of South Dakota in the U.S. Senate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, most of my people in Louisiana, I think, are probably much like your people in Maine. Most of my people—most of our people—they just get up every day and go to work. They obey the law. They pay their taxes. They try to do the right thing by their kids, try to teach their kids morals. And they try to save a little money for retirement as they enjoy living in what they believe is the greatest country in all of human history. But many of my people, Mr. President, are struggling.

President Biden took office on January 20 of last year. So—what are we?—we are in day 490 of Build Back Better. From where many of my people sit, nothing has been built and nothing is back and nothing is better. There is not a more appropriate example of that than the cost of living, inflation.

When President Biden took office, the cost of gasoline in my State was \$2—\$2 a gallon. It is between \$4.15 and \$4.25 right now. And it is not just gasoline, Mr. President. I mean, I don't need to tell you. A dozen eggs now costs \$2.52. Ground beef is \$5.41. A pound of chicken is \$4.10.

The price of oil, the price of gasoline affects so much in terms of our economy. I mean, most of our food and our clothes and our plastics, the things we use every day, are delivered by air, by van, by tanker, all of which use gasoline. Pharmaceuticals are affected by the price of oil.

I don't think it is any secret that the Biden administration is trying to disrupt the production of oil in America. I think that is just a fact. We see it in the President canceling leases on Federal lands in the Gulf of Mexico, in ANWR. We see it from the difficult regulatory environment for oil and gas producers.

The President has just promulgated new rules for the National Environmental Policy Act. If those new rules come to fruition, it will be impossible to open a new pipeline in America, and I think we have to be honest about that.

Now, to be fair, the Biden administration is trying to disrupt the production of oil and gas, especially oil, for environmental reasons, of which we are both aware. But, instead, the Biden administration—this seems curious to me—wants us to buy oil from foreign countries. And those foreign countries deliver their oil in tankers that use 2,000 gallons of fuel an hour and emit 8 tons of carbon dioxide into the environment per hour. The irony of this is rich.

Inflation and oil—once again, I think so much of our inflation in all of the products that we need to maintain our standard of living today starts with the price of oil. Now, President Biden has said he has no control over the price of oil and, therefore, the price of gasoline. But, Mr. President, you can't have regulatory control over the drilling, the transporting, the storage, the refining, the trading, and the taxation of oil as the President does and say you have no control over the price of the commodity. I mean, that is just not true.

Here is what most people in my State see. Mr. President. The President, in March of last year, sent every American a \$1,400 stimulus check. And they were grateful, but then the Biden administration, for its next trick, crashed their 401(k)s, increased their food bills by as much—for some as much as \$3,000 a year; increased their rent, for many as much as \$2,000 a year; and increased their gas bills for many as much as \$1,000 a year.

And they don't see that as a good trade, Mr. President. And it is all derived from President Biden's energy policy, which is—here is his energy policy: wind, solar, and wishful thinking. It is just not realistic. And among other things, it is hurting our country. It is hurting my people in Louisiana desperately because of the rise in gasoline prices.

I was very disappointed to see this week that the President has changed his approach to inflation and the price of gasoline. He has said we are now in a transition period, and he said it as if that were a positive thing. He said we are on a transition, and when we get through this transition, we are going to be stronger than ever because we are not going to have to rely on fossil fuels.

And I am thinking, you know, I respect the President; but honestly, what planet did he parachute in from?

I had just finished reading JPMorgan's energy report; and JPMorgan, looking out until 2030—not 2050, 2030—just 8 years from now—said, in 2030, at the rate we are going, the demand for energy in America will be 20 percent greater than the supply. You know what that is going to do to the price, Mr. President. The JPMorgan energy report said that, at a minimum, in 2030, 8 years from now, the demand for oil is going to be 10 percent higher in America and the demand for natural gas is going to be 18 percent higher. You know what that is going to do to

prices. And the President is talking about this glorious transition as if this is going to last forever.

I don't know about the good people of Maine, but the good people of Louisiana, they just can't afford it. And my people deserve better.

Now, what is the answer? Here is my opinion: We have got to stop spending. The Federal Reserve has got to be given a chance to do its job. The U.S. Congress has a budget that we have set for the United States of America. We need to live within our budget. Except for defense spending, we need to freeze spending. We need to freeze it and give the Federal Reserve a chance to get this inflation under control.

Thank you, Mr. President. My people deserve better. The people of America deserve better.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS HEATH ROBINSON PACT ACT OF 2022

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I want to thank the Senator from Maine for the recognition. I appreciate it very, very much.

I will be very brief. I ask for up to 5 minutes, which I will use less than that.

Today is a historic day. Today, the Senate has agreed to move one step forward to the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson PACT Act of 2022. I want to thank Ranking Member MORAN and Senators BOOZMAN and HEINRICH for working with me to help deliver this bipartisan solution. It is the most comprehensive toxic exposure package for our veterans that Congress has ever delivered in this country's history. Frankly, it is one that has been years in the making. Actually, it has been decades in the making.

Named after a veteran who died from exposure to a toxic burn pit, this bill will address decades of inaction and failure by the U.S. Government to do the right thing by delivering toxic-exposed veterans their long-overdue healthcare and benefits.

This bill spans generations of veterans. It expands the presumption of Agent Orange exposure for those who served in Vietnam. Yes, that is right. That is what I said. We still haven't done right by the Vietnam-era veterans, but this bill makes it right. It adds new service-connected conditions to Agent Orange, including hypertension.

This bill also expands healthcare for more than 3½ million post-9/11 combat veterans and service-connects two dozen conditions caused by burn pit exposure, from cancers to lung disease.

To pull this off, we have to give the VA the resources it needs to better serve vets. This bill does that by funding more employees to process claims, upgrading claims processing technology, authorizing innovative ways to hire and retain VA healthcare staff, and investing in VA facilities across the country.

Passing this bill in Congress and getting it to the President's desk is the only way to keep our end of the bargain to our All-Volunteer military. This cannot be overstated: Freedom is not free. There is a price to pay. We send men and women in uniform off to fight wars on our behalf. You don't have to be a veteran exposed to Agent Orange and burn pits to understand that price.

The fact is that hundreds of thousands of veterans in my State and across this country are already paying for it, and they can no longer wait. So now is the time, folks. We are going to get back from Memorial Day. We are all going to be at Memorial Day events, and we are going to be celebrating the folks who gave the ultimate sacrifice. When we come back, we need to vote and celebrate the folks who have survived but yet have the impacts of toxic exposure.

I would encourage your support for this bill when we get back the week of June 6.

I yield the floor.

#### NOMINATION OF MARCIA BERNICAT

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise in support of Marcia Bernicat to be the Director General of the foreign service at the U.S. Department of State. Our foreign service must have a leader that knows how to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. We need someone that understands the importance of modernizing the State Department workforce. We need someone who will prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility to reflect our Nation's wide range of backgrounds. Ambassador Bernicat is that person. She is an experienced career member of the Senior Foreign Service who has a deep understanding of the inner-workings of the Department and valuable overseas experience. She has served as Ambassador to Senegal and Guinea Bissau and as Ambassador to Bangladesh. Both times before, this body confirmed her by voice vote.

While serving as Ambassador to Bangladesh, she survived a terrorist attack on her motorcade, an experience that strengthened her resolve to keep Foreign Service Officers safe while serving abroad. She has also worked as the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Human Resources. She speaks French, Hindi, and Russian and is a recipient of the Secretary of State's Distinguished Service Award. She has a master's degree in the science in foreign service at Georgetown University and a bachelor's degree from Lafayette College. As a former Deputy Assistant Secretary working on human resources, she understands the personnel challenges facing the Department. Last but not least, Ambassador Bernicat was born in the great State of New Jersey.

In short, Ambassador Bernicat is without a doubt the right person for this position. It is unacceptable that someone as qualified as her has been languishing on the Senate floor for

more than 7 months. Her nomination comes at a critical time as the Department needs leadership that will address key issues like attrition, training, morale, and mental health. We need our best people in position to ensure we are recruiting, retaining, promoting, and training the next generation of leaders. It is long past time to confirm Ambassador Bernicat.

I enthusiastically support Ambassador Bernicat, and I respectfully urge my colleagues to join me in confirming her immediately.

#### VOTE ON THE BERNICAT NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bernicat nomination?

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Oregon (Mr. MERKLEY), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mrs. BLACKBURN), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), and the Senator from Ohio (Mr. PORTMAN).

The result was announced—yeas 82, nays 10, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 212 Ex.]

#### YEAS—82

Baldwin	Hagerty	Reed
Barrasso	Hassan	Risch
Bennet	Heinrich	Romney
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Blunt	Hirono	Rounds
Booker	Hoover	Rubio
Brown	Inhofe	Sasse
Burr	Johnson	Schatz
Cantwell	Kaine	Schumer
Capito	Kelly	Shaheen
Cardin	Kennedy	Sinema
Carper	King	Smith
Casey	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Cassidy	Lankford	Sullivan
Collins	Leahy	Tester
Coons	Lujan	Thune
Cornyn	Lummis	Tillis
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Toomey
Crapo	Markey	Tuberville
Daines	Marshall	Warner
Duckworth	McConnell	Warnock
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Ernst	Moran	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murphy	Wicker
Fischer	Murray	Wyden
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Young
Graham	Padilla	
Grassley	Peters	

#### NAYS—10

Boozman	Hyde-Smith	Scott (SC)
Braun	Lee	Shelby
Cotton	Paul	
Hawley	Scott (FL)	

#### NOT VOTING—8

Blackburn	Merkley	Sanders
Cramer	Murkowski	Van Hollen
Cruz	Portman	

The nomination was confirmed. The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY).