

In a recent survey conducted by the New York Times, 94 percent of school counselors said their students were showing more signs of anxiety and depression than before the pandemic. And 88 percent said students were having more trouble regulating their emotions and almost three-quarters said they were having difficulty solving conflicts with their friends. One counselor said: “Kids are more impulsive, [they are] less controlled, and struggle with emotional regulation.”

I believe we need to take this opportunity to support our children who struggle with emotional or mental health problems, and that is something I believe will bring us together and all 100 Senators can agree on.

Another big issue is school safety. This shooter should never have been able to gain access to Robb Elementary School that day. Again, the circumstances of how he gained that access are still under investigation. Initial reports indicated the door had been propped open. Now the police say the door had been closed but did not automatically lock like it was supposed to. If our schools need more resources to harden their infrastructure and evaluate their physical security measures and make necessary improvements, that is something we can agree on and something we need to do. No one should be able to walk through the door of a school and access a classroom so easily. You can't get into an airport very easily. We know how to do this.

Improving school safety also means reviewing current protocol, developing best practices, and adding or maybe expanding the number of school resource officers.

These are commonsense ways to save lives, and we need to provide schools with the resources to protect our students and our teachers.

I am a proud supporter of the Second Amendment, period. We also recognize, though, that there are people who are prohibited by current law from purchasing guns, like the shooter in Sutherland Springs, because of criminal records or mental illness.

We are discussing possible additional reforms to keep guns out of the hands of people who are not legally allowed to purchase or possess them in the first place. If we reach an agreement, law-abiding gun owners will not be impacted at all. Our conversations are ongoing, and, indeed, all 100 Senators will be part of that conversation, but these are the broad parameters of the things that I am interested in addressing. We are not talking about banning a category of weapons across the board, a ban on certain high-capacity magazines, or changing the background check system by adding additional disqualifying items. If we are actually serious about finding common ground and building consensus, those sorts of things will stand no chance of passing the Senate. Instead, we are talking about commonsense, targeted reforms that are responsive to the tragedies in

Uvalde and elsewhere and that will, I believe, help save lives—strengthening mental health, bolstering school security, keeping guns out of the hands of people who are already legally prohibited from having them. I think a lot of our colleagues could get behind those provisions like they did with the Fix NICS bill.

Following Sutherland Springs, we came up with a targeted bill to address specific circumstances. I hope we can do so again. I will not settle on inadequate or downright harmful legislation for the sake of doing something. That is not productive for anyone.

That is one of the things I hear the most. People say “Do something.” Well, we can agree that something needs to be done, but what that something is, is much harder to achieve, and so targeted reforms, I think, are the way to get to where we need to go.

I understand the desire for quick action, but I hope the Democratic leader will allow bipartisan discussions to continue and then conclude before he pulls the plug and schedules show votes on something he knows can't pass. He has threatened to do it, but I don't believe we ought to try to meet artificial deadlines. We know how to do this, and I think giving the Senate adequate time over the next week or so to try to reach that consensus is eminently reasonable.

I don't believe the Senate will be voting this week because good consensus legislation takes time. So I hope Senator SCHUMER will let his Members work. There is no use in rushing a vote on a doomed, partisan bill like the House is expected to vote on this week. My goal is to achieve a result, and the only way we can do that, the only way we can get a bill that will pass both Chambers and earn the President's signature, is by taking the time and reaching that consensus.

Right now, there is not a bill out there that stands a chance of succeeding in the coming days, but my hope is that will change by allowing the Senate to do the work we know how to do and come up with a bipartisan bill that commands the support of 60-plus Members of the Senate and something we can send to the President for his signature.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS HEATH ROBINSON ACT

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, it is an honor to be here on the Senate floor tonight to talk about a topic, and it is an honor to have you in the Chair as I do so.

I rise late this afternoon to discuss a piece of legislation that will be before

the Senate perhaps for a good portion of this week and maybe even into the next. It is the most comprehensive toxic exposure package the Senate has ever considered in our Nation's history.

Since September 11, 2001, up to 3.5 million deployed servicemembers have potentially encountered toxic exposures from burn pits. During a deployment to a war zone, military personnel are often exposed to toxic hazards, many of which have been associated with chronic health issues.

Not really as an aside but unrelated to this piece of legislation, a cause I now undertake and have been pursuing since this topic arose is to make sure that in the future, there are no burn pits that our service men and women encounter in their service to our Nation. While we are preparing to take care of those who have experienced burn pits in the past, let there be no more burn pit experiences.

Until almost 2010, the U.S. military kept burn pits on bases for the disposal of chemicals, plastics, medical waste, and other substances that were just burned with jet fuel, creating toxic substances, toxic smoke.

Currently, the VA can provide service-connected disability claims related to burn pit exposures; however, due to lack of evidence, scientific data, and information from the Department of Defense, at least 70 percent of the claims are denied.

Over the past 2 years, nearly every veterans service organization has testified before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and emphasized the importance of fixing the process the VA uses to provide healthcare and benefits to toxic-exposed veterans. JON TESTER, the Senator from Montana, the chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I have worked in a bipartisan fashion with these veterans organizations, with veterans, with advocates, with the VA, and with our Senate colleagues on and off of the committee to craft a comprehensive bill to deliver all generations of toxic-exposed veterans long-overdue healthcare and benefits.

Three weeks ago, Senator TESTER and I announced the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring Our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022. It has many priorities, but among those, this historic legislation will, one, expand VA healthcare eligibility; two, improve the VA's presumption process; three, bolster the VA's toxic exposure training and resources; four, strengthen toxic exposure research; and five, set up VA and veterans for success.

Last week over Memorial Day, our country paused to remember and honor those who served our Nation. My expectation—my guess is that almost every Member of the U.S. Senate in some fashion over the weekend spent time with veterans, paying respect, giving them honor.

One Kansas veteran, when I was in Wichita, told me that he and his dad

both served in the U.S. Navy and that both had an experience with exposure to hazardous and toxic materials. He said he didn't believe that either one of them suffered any major health issues from their exposure. It caused me to think that this is a veteran who is not necessarily going to care about this legislation, but what he said was that it was a concern that there would not be any help from the VA if they did, and they lived in fear and uncertainty.

The veteran who didn't think he or she had any negative consequences from exposure to toxic substances still worried about "What would happen if I did? What would happen if my health deteriorates" and worried that the VA would not be there for them or their families.

After hearing the news of our comprehensive toxic exposure bill, this veteran said:

You have now changed that for thousands of veterans and their families.

The uncertainty, the fear is diminished and maybe gone.

It is time to advance this legislation and bring us one step closer to connecting all generations of toxic-exposed veterans with the care they need and deserve and to provide veterans with certainty and support.

I honor, I thank, I have great gratitude for every generation of veterans, and in my family's lifetime, those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are among the most significant to us. But Vietnam is a part of my life as a 16-year-old boy, a junior in high school. In fact, if you were a senior in my high school—my high school of 71 kids in my class, so I know them all—if you were just a year older than me, you served in Vietnam. And I saw how they were treated when they returned from their service, and they were treated terribly by fellow American citizens.

As a 16-year-old kid, I told myself, I am going to do everything I can to honor and respect those who serve, see if I can compensate for the circumstances these people—many of whom I knew personally—can I compensate for what they are experiencing today in the early 1970s and the midseventies?

I never expected to be a Member of the U.S. Senate. Nothing in my life would suggest that that would be the case—the grace of God, the kindness of Kansans. But upon my arrival in Congress, in the House and now the Senate, it became important for me to do something more than just honor and respect veterans, to do something more than saying "thank you," to do the things that I can do as a Member of a legislative body to make certain that the Department of Veterans Affairs does its job but most importantly, that I as a Member of Congress do mine.

It is important for us to pay respect, but it is also perhaps even more important for us to make certain those who serve our Nation receive the care and benefits that they are entitled to and that they deserve. It is beyond just

saying "thank you"; it is saying "thank you" by action.

It is time to advance this legislation and bring us one step closer to connecting all generations to the circumstances that war brought to them and their families. And I hope that after Memorial Day, we brought back with us as we return this Monday—Memorial Day being a week ago today—that we brought back with us a sense of what their sacrifice means and commit to living our lives and doing our jobs worthy of their sacrifice.

Decade after decade, service men and women have deployed to countries around the globe in defense of freedom, and we have seen just within the last year that there is no moment in which everyone is safe. There is no moment in which we may not have to ask people to continue to serve, to serve longer, or to begin their service in defense of freedom in the United States and freedom around the world.

Unfortunately, throughout history, many of them were exposed to harmful toxins during that service that resulted in life-altering health conditions.

Too many veterans—far too many veterans—face too many battles when they return home and are seeking the care and benefits they desperately need. Our veterans deserve better, and they are tired of waiting for solutions.

This week, this body—the U.S. Senate—will discuss the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Act at great length, and I look forward to speaking more about this historic legislation on the Senate floor and with my colleagues so that we can deliver to all generations of toxic-exposed veterans the relief, the assistance, and maybe, yes, just the lack of fear, the lack of uncertainty that they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, I want to concur in the remarks just expressed by my colleague, and we do honor our veterans. And Senator MORAN serves as our ranking member at the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and we appreciate his leadership, as we all seek to honor that service and to fulfill the obligation that this great Nation has made to our veterans who don't shrink from service, who don't pass the blame. They get up every day and they execute on their mission, and I think it is important for each and every one of us to remember that our service should do honor to the service and the sacrifice that they have made.

INFLATION

Madam President, for about the past year, our current President, President Biden, and many of the Democrats in the House and the Senate—where the Democrats are in charge of each of those Chambers—they have spent a great deal of time blaming everyone but themselves for the historic levels of inflation that have ruined the economy and made the American people very nervous about what two more

years of this "Build Back Broke" agenda would mean for them.

I have said before that Tennesseans feel like they have no idea who is in control in this country, over in the White House, or, indeed, if anyone over at the White House is in control in this country.

And if you look at all the various characters featured in Biden's inflation blame game, you might be tempted to think that Biden himself is wondering the very same thing: Who is in control? Who is calling the shots?

But the truth is that no one in the White House is confused or shocked by how bad things have gotten. They know exactly how we got here because they did it because every step they took along the way was a deliberate attempt to reject common sense and manipulate the people into accepting a radical economic agenda.

Well, in July of last year, President Biden insisted that inflation was "transitory" and that if we could just bring on a little bit more time and a little bit more effort and hang in there a little bit longer, you know what, everything was going to be just fine.

He didn't want the people to panic and start questioning the narrative that the White House was pushing forward every single day.

Surprising no one, that argument didn't fly. The people weren't buying it. So in October, suddenly, not only was inflation a problem, but, guess what, it was former President Trump's fault. That is right—not this administration's fault, not the Democrats', not President Biden, it was President Trump's fault.

Well, the American people, they weren't having that either. They weren't buying that line, and over the next 5 months, the COVID-19 pandemic, so-called global challenges, supply chain, and, of course, Vladimir Putin, and then Senate Republicans—everybody took a turn in the blame game seat for President Biden and the White House. It was everybody's fault but theirs.

Isn't that absolutely amazing? Just amazing. The people in control of everything—the House, the Senate, the executive branch, the White House, controlling it all—they had nothing to do with this, they want you to believe.

Well, yes, indeed, they had everything to do with it.

So last month, the Democrats had exhausted this rotation of villains, as they like to call it. Well, they panicked and they decided, once again, that they had to just go out here and convince the American people that, yes, indeed, inflation was transitory. It was going to be short-lived. It was only 8½ percent, they would say—only.

But go fill up the car. Go to the grocery store. You know they are wrong.

Well, unfortunately for Joe Biden, the American people are much smarter and more in tune with day-to-day life than the left has given them credit for.

This administration is now in damage control mode.