

they seek care and benefits because of the impact of toxic exposure on their lives.

In the worst care scenarios, folks are paying the price with their lives—veterans and heroes like Sergeant First Class Robinson, for whom this bill is named after.

Look, we have made some incredible advances as a country over our history when it comes to taking care of our servicemembers both in-theater and after they get back home. The survival on the battlefield now compared to 50 years ago has been improved amazingly.

Prosthetics—we have done some amazing work with prosthetics for the folks who have come back who are missing limbs. We have been working hard on mental health. We are not where we need to be, but we are making some advances. We have got more stuff to do, particularly in the area of transition and implementation of alternate forms of mental healthcare.

But the fact is, with toxic exposure, we have never done a good job. This bill will put the VA and put this Nation on the right track to addressing decades of inaction and failure by our government—by us—to pay for the cost of the war.

So what does it do? It expands eligibility—expands eligibility—for VA healthcare to more than 3½ million combat veterans exposed to burn pits since 9/11.

It supports our post-9/11 and Vietnam-era veterans by removing the burden of proof for 23 presumptive conditions caused by toxic exposure, from cancers to lung diseases.

It establishes a framework for the establishment of future presumptions of service connection related to toxic exposure. So why is this important? Well, you know how the Senate works. Oftentimes, it takes a long time to get much done, and it has taken an act of Congress—literally, an act of Congress—to get these presumptives approved in the past.

Now the VA is going to have a structure where they can follow the science and get these toxic exposures covered, the ones that are going to happen in the future—and, unfortunately, I am afraid that they will happen in the future so this structure is important.

This bill also gives the VA the tools it needs to bolster its workforce, to establish more healthcare facilities, to improve claims processing, which will better meet the immediate and future needs of every veteran that the VA serves.

I have talked about the costs. The costs are \$287 billion over 10—significant, very significant, but it is a cost of war.

Keep in mind that this substitute—because of the work that the staffs have done in a bipartisan way—is \$50 billion less than the House-passed toxic exposure bill.

So we have done our best to make sure that this bill meets the needs of

our veterans and also meets the needs of our taxpayers.

This is the right thing to do, and it is the right thing to get done today because right now our veterans are paying the cost. They are the only ones paying the cost, and they cannot afford to wait any longer.

I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Lisa M. Gomez, of New Jersey, to be an Assistant Secretary of Labor.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 6 months ago, the Washington Post published an extremely disturbing report.

According to the report, a man in his mid-20s was stopped near the house of a Supreme Court Justice carrying a weapon and burglary tools. He reportedly told police he intended to murder the Justice. Reportedly, he indicated he was angry at the decision he thinks the Court may reach in an upcoming case in light of the unconscionable leak from a few weeks back.

So this is where we are. This is where we are. If these reports are correct, it was an assassination attempt against a sitting Justice, or something close to it.

This is exactly—exactly—the kind of event that many feared that the terrible breach of the Court's rules and norms could fuel. This is exactly the kind of event that many worried the unhinged, reckless, apocalyptic rhetoric from prominent figures toward the Court going back many months and especially in recent weeks could make more likely.

This is exactly—exactly—why the Senate passed legislation very shortly after the leak to enhance the police protection for Justices and their families. This is commonsense, non-controversial legislation that passed in this Chamber—in this Chamber—unanimously.

But House Democrats have spent weeks blocking—blocking the measure that passed here unanimously related

to security for Supreme Court Justices. The House's Democrats have refused to take it up.

Now, look, that needs to change, and it needs to change right now. Right now. House Democrats must pass this bill and they need to do it today. No more fiddling around with this. They need to pass it today. They need to stop their multiweek blockade against the Supreme Court security bill and pass it before the sun sets today.

I will have more to say on this subject as the facts continue to unfold.

INFLATION

Mr. President, on a completely different matter, rising food prices have been one of the most relentless and painful aspects of the historic inflation unfolding on Democrats' watch.

One year ago, President Biden's White House bragged—bragged—that the cost of an Independence Day cook-out would be 16-cents cheaper than the year before. Well, in the past year food prices have jumped more than 9 percent. So that same spread won't be cents cheaper, it will be dollars more expensive.

Grocery store prices have risen at their fastest rate since 1980, and at full-service restaurants, prices have jumped more in the past 12 months than any year on record. Any year on record. There has been 17 straight months of rising food prices.

So this is not a "Putin" price hike. As one of my constituents in Nancy, KY, put it a few months back, "Many people are scared that they might have to choose between eating and heating the house."

Democrats' failed policies have made it harder to feed a family in America, but the pain isn't limited to the supermarket or to the dinner table, it includes producers at every step of the supply chain.

According to the owner of Jot 'Em Down Store, which boasts the oldest lunch counter in Lexington, rising costs have come from all directions. "This year, we've been hampered by supply chain issues, rising gas prices [and] inflation . . ."

In my hometown of Louisville, the operator of one stand at the local farmers market elaborated, "The feed to feed animals has gone up. Packaging, processing has gone up. . . . Butter has gone up three times in the last 4 weeks." Our food producers are feeling the pinch.

A soybean farmer in Muhlenberg County put it this way: "I can put out two, maybe three crops in years past for what it's costing this year."

A corn grower in Christian County says rising prices are "crippling family farms like mine."

Of course, Kentucky farmers are not alone. Across America, farm country has been absolutely hammered on Democrats' watch. And by the Biden administration's own data, farm production expenses from animal feed to diesel fuel are climbing even higher this year than last year.

It is a really hard time to be in the business of feeding America. But it didn't have to be this way. It didn't have to be this way. Washington Democrats didn't have to ram through a multitrillion-dollar wish list of inflationary spending last spring. The Biden administration didn't have to declare war on affordable American energy on day one.

Needless to say, millions of working American families sit down for dinner these days wondering why on Earth they did.

TRIBUTE TO KENNY KLEIN

Mr. President, now finally, on one totally different matter, it is my privilege today to pay honor to an iconic Kentuckian.

The NCAA basketball season may only last 5 months, but for our outgoing University of Louisville media relations manager and Senior Associate Athletic Director Kenny Klein, the game has been a four-decade odyssey.

When Kenny joined the U of L program in 1983, he was the youngest Sports Information Director at an NCAA Division I football school. Now some might have doubted this young Tennessean could manage U of L's impassioned fan base or Louisville's prickly sports reporters, but he proved them all wrong. Long after games ended, after players went back to the locker rooms, after fans returned home, Kenny would stay in his office well into the night. He would pore over notes and statistics to perfect his answers to journalists' questions, and he would stash a cold beer in his desk for any reporter who spent the long nights with him.

He was there for the team's highs—888 wins, two NCAA titles—and he deftly managed the team's lows as well. Referring to Kenny's flawless handling of media frenzies, one former *Courier-Journal* sports journalist suggested Kenny could run a course in crisis management in his retirement. That kind of sterling praise from an adversarial journalist, no less, is proof of Kenny's magic touch with the media.

Over the course of his long career, he became the face U of L basketball to fans spanning generations. As an example, the star player of the 1986 championship squad Kenny Payne arrived on campus during Klein's second year on the job. And next year, Payne will be on the court coaching the school's basketball program. So students, athletes, and administrators came and went, but they could always count on Kenny Klein's constant presence.

Since announcing his retirement, Kenny has received an outpouring of support from across the country, including a Lifetime Achievement Award from the College Sports Information Directors of America.

Everyone, from Louisville's newest students to Kenny's biggest fan in the U.S. Capitol, is sad to see him leave his post. And we are glad that, after some

begging, he has promised to stay at U of L in a reduced capacity.

So we all wish him the best in the next chapter of his extraordinary life.

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

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

TITLE 42

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 3 weeks ago, a Federal judge blocked the Biden Administration from lifting title 42 COVID restrictions. It was a welcome decision that will hopefully stave off an additional flood of illegal immigration on our southern border. But it has been pretty much the only bit of good news on this front, because the situation at our southern border is out of control.

In April, U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered 234,088 individuals attempting to cross our border illegally—234,088. That is the highest number ever recorded.

The Border Patrol is stretched thin. A recent article reported that “around 60 percent of CBP agents have been assigned to process migrants, taking them away from field work.” Sixty percent. Detention facilities are overflowing and massive numbers of illegal immigrants are being released into the country, many of whom will never report to an immigration office as ordered.

In short, our southern border is in chaos, and if title 42 is lifted, the situation is almost guaranteed to become much worse.

The Department of Homeland Security has estimated that as many as 18,000 migrants per day could attempt to cross our southern border if the policy is lifted. Eighteen thousand per day—that is more than double the number we are currently experiencing, and the administration has yet to implement any plan for dealing with such a situation.

Illegal immigration, especially the kind of out-of-control illegal immigration we are now experiencing, has serious consequences. Criminals, including human traffickers, drug smugglers, and gang members, regularly attempt to cross our southern border. The worse the situation at our border gets, the easier it is for those individuals to make their way into the United States, and that has consequences for our entire country.

South Dakota law enforcement officials tell me that they are seizing drugs that they can trace directly back to the cartels who smuggle these drugs across our border. Our country is currently in the midst of a fentanyl crisis. In fact, right now, fentanyl overdose is the leading cause of death for U.S. adults between the ages of 18 and 45. And where is all this fentanyl coming

from? Most of it is being trafficked across our southern border; and when more and more of our Customs and Border Protection agents have been pulled off the border to process migrants, it is pretty much a guarantee that drug smugglers are having a much easier time in getting their product into the country.

I mentioned that Customs and Border Protection encountered more than 234,000 individuals who were attempting to cross our southern border illegally in the month of April, but that number only reflects individuals the CBP has actually apprehended. In April, Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas testified that, in addition to the 1.7 million apprehensions at the southern border in fiscal year 2021, there were more than 389,000 “got-aways”—individuals the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend.

The Economist recently reported:

One border expert estimates that less than 20 percent of people trying to cross the border undetected are stopped.

The administration has attempted to suggest that the surge in illegal immigration that we have been experiencing since President Biden took office is, in large part, a function of conditions in other countries; but while these factors exist—and there are legitimate asylum claims at the border—that doesn't mean there is nothing the President can do about our out-of-control border situation. Better border security is well within the President's control. He is just not interested in putting it in place, and his Vice President has all but formally abandoned her role as border czar.

In fact, since taking office, the President has invited increased illegal immigration with the policy decisions that he has made. On his very first day in office, President Biden rescinded the declaration of a national emergency at our southern border; he halted construction of the border wall; he revoked a Trump administration order that called for the government to faithfully execute our immigration laws; and his Department of Homeland Security issued guidelines pausing deportations except under certain conditions. That was all—all—on his first day in office.

Needless to say, the effect of all of this was to declare to the world that the U.S. borders were effectively open. And, of course, the President's anti-border security efforts didn't end there.

The President has significantly limited the ability of Immigration and Customs Enforcement to enforce immigration laws. Deportations dropped precipitously during fiscal year 2021, as did arrests in the interior of the country. In March, the administration rescinded a 2019 rule expanding the expedited removal for individuals here illegally; and as I have mentioned, of course, the administration is attempting to remove title 42 COVID-19 restrictions with no visible plan to control the resulting surge in illegal immigration.