

and here, they have too much debt, and it is their own damn fault.

I couldn't disagree more. Students, when you are 19 or 20 years old, don't know what is a reasonable debt and what isn't. They just don't have life experience. Many of them are first-generation college students in their family. Mom and dad are not much help. They want to see their kids get a college degree. That is supposed to be the ticket to success. So young people sign up for loans, and they sign up in schools that can't produce a diploma that leads to a job, and they get stuck with it.

Vickie, I mentioned earlier, tried her best to pay off these loans and doesn't have much luck. She says that being freed of some of this debt is going to be at least lifting part of the burden. Let's be honest about it. I don't know that she is lazy or if "barista" is now a negative term. I don't think it is. Those folks are working, and I respect the fact that they are.

She said, "I'm not asking for anything for free. I just think things should be fair. Education should be affordable. And we ought to be able to earn enough to pay back what we owe."

These Republican colleagues of mine are setting out to stop this plan by Joe Biden. I guess it will be a great source of pride if they do it. They can say: We stopped this relief for all of these young people who are in debt. We sunk them deeper into despair. And we did it because it is an election year.

I think it is unfortunate. The President's student loan forgiveness plan is not a giveaway to rich doctors and lawyers who racked up big debt at Ivy League schools. Ninety-eight percent of the student loan borrowers did not attend those schools. The majority of these debts are held by families who have zero net worth—zero. What will their life be like without help? Nearly 90 percent of the relief dollars in the President's plan will go to borrowers who earn less than \$75,000 a year.

And let's reflect for a moment on what has happened over the last few years in the United States of America under the previous President who will go unnamed and what we have seen as a result of this pandemic.

Remember when we came up and were unable to articulate the number "trillion dollars" without shaking? We started talking about trillion-dollar relief packages in the pandemic. And we said to people: We are going to have loans through the Small Business Administration for people who have a job or a business and need a helping hand in terms of borrowing money to get by. And if you can prove that you spent the money on payroll and utilities and rent, it is forgiven.

So take a look at that mechanism. Through no fault of their own, they were stuck with debt because of the pandemic. They borrowed money from the Federal Government—taxpayers' money—and if they could spend it for the right things, it was forgiven, a

walkaway. I didn't hear a lot of speeches about "slatternly baristas" at that point in time. And we have also seen it happen before. In fact, we have had a number of Members of Congress who applied for some of those PPP loans.

The same people who are criticizing forgiving student loan debts literally personally borrowed money that they didn't pay back to the Federal Government, and they don't think there is anything wrong with that. I can go into a long list of people who have benefited by loans that were forgiven or grants given by the Federal Government.

Better than going through that list, let me say the bottom line is this: If we can help these young student borrowers with an opportunity to reduce the debt they owe and get their lives back online, that is a great outcome for them and a great one for this Nation.

The same type of idealism that drove us to the National Defense Education Act after Sputnik applies as well today. We should have a well-trained, well-educated American workforce ready to compete with the world. I think we can do it. Joe Biden's step is a reasonable, humane step in the right direction. It should have bipartisan support.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4798

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, last month, in a completely partisan process, Senate Democrats pushed through their progressive and deceptively named Inflation Reduction Act. That bill was a disaster, as it was full of reckless tax increases and spending.

Perhaps the worst part of it was that it authorized \$80 billion in new funding to the IRS—\$80 billion. For reference, that is about the same as what we allocated for Florida's entire State budget when I was Governor, and Florida is the third largest State in the Nation. Even though the IRS does a poor job with the resources it currently has, the Democrats opted to supersize the IRS so they could fund 87,000 new IRS agents, some of whom will be armed and willing to use deadly force to carry out their duties.

So, while the Democrats are calling to defund the police and are leaving our Border Patrol agents without the tools they need to secure the southern border, they are happy to enlarge the IRS. We don't even have 20,000 Border Patrol agents—a quarter of the number of new IRS agents the Democrats want; yet they have now approved 87,000 additional IRS agents. That is insane.

That many agents under the direction of President Biden should concern every American. We all remember that when Joe Biden was Vice President, the IRS went after conservative groups and Tea Party organizations. Now, armed with tens of billions in new funding and tens of thousands of new agents, what is stopping Joe Biden

from directing the IRS to go after groups he doesn't like? What about pregnancy resource centers or Second Amendment groups?

Here is what the Democrats are doing: They are turning the IRS into a super Agency to audit more Americans so they can fund even more of their reckless tax-and-spend agenda. Let's not forget that last year, the Democrats wanted the IRS to spy on nearly every American's bank account and track one's everyday transactions. American families can see straight through Biden's plans, and they are furious. We all should be furious.

Without a single Republican vote, the Democrats authorized 87,000 more IRS agents—doubling the size of the Agency—all to pull as many dollars as they can away from hard-working families and small businesses so they can fund liberal projects and appease their radical base with more government bailouts.

Case in point: Biden's illegal order to transfer student loan debt from borrowers to taxpayers. Someone has to pay for the hundreds of billions of dollars of debt that these borrowers voluntarily took on. Now, instead of the borrowers paying for their own educations, that burden is now borne by every American taxpayer. You didn't go to college? The Democrats don't care. You will pay the debt of lawyers and doctors. Have you already paid off your loans? Biden doesn't want to hear it. Tough luck. Your taxes are the money pot for other people's student debts, and if Democrats are going to keep declaring everything to be free, Biden is going to need a lot more taxpayer money.

That, my fellow Americans, is how we get full circle back to the supersized IRS. It is a vicious cycle to fund a radical, socialist agenda. We have to stop it now.

I am here to do what countless Floridians have asked me to do—strike this terrible policy from law. It is time to rein in the Federal Government, and that work begins with putting a stop to Biden's IRS army. My bill would simply repeal this disastrous IRS expansion, and I ask all of my colleagues to support it.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 4798. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, it is time for a reality check here in the Senate.

The far right has had an awful lot to say about the IRS in these last few days. Even Senators who should supposedly know better are spinning wild fantasy stories about 87,000 agents who are armed to the teeth and coming to

the doors of innocent small business people. All this talk is unscathed by the truth.

Here is what is true: Every year, wealthy tax cheats and scofflaw corporations skip out on paying what they owe and rip off the American people for billions and billions of dollars. Let me say that again. Wealthy tax cheats are ripping off innocent taxpayers, every year, of billions and billions of dollars. They are sophisticated. They are wealthy. They want to protect the status quo. By attacking the IRS, the Republicans are helping high-flying tax cheats get away with breaking the law.

The IRS has had its resources gutted by the Republicans over the last decade. It is badly outmatched now by the wealthy tax cheats, who have armies of lawyers and accountants who are prying open loopholes and hiding income in the shadows. Let me give the Senate an example.

A few weeks ago, I put out the findings of a yearlong Finance Committee investigation into the largest alleged tax evasion scheme by one individual in American history. With the right financial wizardry and a complicated network of offshore accounts and partnerships, this individual, Robert Brockman, was able to evade taxes on over \$2 billion in income. To hide his money, he set up offshore entities that we call shell banks. They were offshore entities dressed up like financial institutions that Mr. Brockman set up to hide his money from the IRS, betting correctly that the IRS wouldn't have the resources to uncover his scheme. There may be hundreds of thousands more of these shell banks that the IRS has never examined.

The Finance Committee is also in the midst of an investigation into the tax practices of some of the biggest members of Big Pharma. One of the companies whose tax data we examined was AbbVie. In 2020, 75 percent of AbbVie's sales were made in the United States, but AbbVie reported only 1 percent of its income to the United States for tax purposes. Earlier this year, we requested financial information from Merck, which makes nearly half of its sales in the United States, but it reported only 14 percent of its income here. We also requested information from Bristol Myers Squibb, which reportedly used a thicket of foreign subsidiaries and partnerships to take its effective tax rate from 24.7 percent all the way down to a negative 7 percent in a single year.

The IRS struggles to do anything about many of these cases even when they get reported in the press. Criminal tax evasion cases have fallen nearly by half. The number of highly trained experts who know how to break down these complex tax evasion cases has fallen by a third. It takes hundreds and hundreds of hours to review the tax filings of corporations and the rich, and the IRS just doesn't have the resources to go after these wealthy tax cheats and scofflaw corporations. So there is a

reason the Democrats believe you have to invest more resources to enforce the laws on the books.

Here is the most important point: It doesn't have anything to do with middle-class taxpayers, because their taxes are taken out automatically of every single paycheck. That is really different than the way the big guys go about their activities in ripping off the little guys with complex tax evasion schemes. What so many Republicans want to do is preserve the status quo so that only the little guys get audited while billionaire friends like Robert Brockman get off scot-free.

Funding for the IRS is also about providing a basic level of customer service to taxpayers who are in Colorado, in Oregon, and in every part of the country. At one point during the filing season this year, the IRS told the Finance Committee that it was able to answer only 11 percent of the service phone calls it was receiving. Taxpayers in America deserve better service from their government, and that means making sure the IRS has the resources to provide it.

The far right and the tax cheats—the wealthy tax cheats—want the IRS, apparently, to continue to struggle because it makes it easier to attack and vilify. That is why we have heard so many falsehoods about the thousands of new IRS agents. I don't know where this number came from. It is absolute nonsense that has been conjured out of nothing.

Even worse are the falsehoods about IRS agents and firearms. Alongside the DEA, the FBI, and other law enforcement Agencies, the IRS often plays a part in going after drug cartels, money launderers, and other serious, hardened criminals. So the question is, How do my Republican colleagues expect IRS criminal investigation officers to defend themselves during drug busts against violent cartels? Should they bring a set of sharpened No. 2 pencils?

We are talking about living in the real world. The IRS funding that the Democrats passed last month is about making sure that the IRS can do its job and meet the expectations of the American people.

I can tell you, as a Senator who has townhall meetings in every county of my State every year, the people of my State say: Look, we are law-abiding. We pay our taxes. There is something way out of whack when these wealthy tax cheats and scofflaw corporations can pay little or nothing.

It is time for Members of Congress to stop going to bat for these wealthy tax cheats who break the law. The IRS needs to be able to crack down on these rip-offs. The IRS needs to be able to provide adequate and timely service. The taxpayers need help, and that is what the IRS funding does.

What we have heard so much about from my colleagues on the far right in raising this specter of agents—thousands of them, armed to the teeth, coming to the doors of small busi-

nesses—is simply unscathed by the truth.

For that reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I agree with my colleague that if you owe taxes, you should pay your taxes, but what is inconsistent with what my colleague just said is that we had an amendment vote that would say that none of these agents could go after anybody making less than \$400,000 a year. Every Democrat, I believe, in the Senate voted against that. So the goal is, absolutely, we should make sure that wealthy taxpayers pay everything they owe, but we had an amendment that would make sure this was focused on wealthy taxpayers—this was during a vote just before we left on recess—and every Democrat voted against that.

For all of those who are watching, here is what you are going to see: The Democratic Party has created a platform to audit more Americans—not just wealthy Americans but all Americans. This isn't about fairness; this is about power. The Democrats want to spy on your bank transactions, and they want to send 87,000 more IRS agents on the streets to collect the bill for their reckless spending.

Joe Biden has pitched his provision in the image of Robin Hood taking from the rich, but in reality, this expansion is in the image of the Sheriff of Nottingham stealing from the poor and the working class.

None of us should be surprised the Democrats are doubling down on the radical IRS expansion policies. We all should be pretty mad. When the Republicans take control of Congress in January, you can expect that we will do everything in our power to repeal this terrible policy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I would just like to briefly discuss the amendment that came up during the budget discussion.

Senate Democrats made it very, very clear that we were strongly against taxing those in our country with incomes under \$400,000. The problem with the amendment that the Republicans offered is they used the word "taxable" income. So, while we strongly opposed raising taxes on middle-class people and others making under \$400,000, the wording of the Republicans' amendment, which talked about taxable income, could have immunized billionaires from being subject to an audit. That is because, as the Presiding Officer and I have talked about, billionaires often live by this "buy, borrow, and die" philosophy, and they have little or no taxable income for years on end. My colleagues probably saw some of the stories, for example, about billionaires who are claiming the child tax credit because their taxable income

is actually low under the way it is defined.

Just to make sure the record is clear, we are all in on this effort of not taxing middle-income folks. We subscribe completely. In fact, it is what we had in the bill, and our enforcement section made that clear as well. But we are not for creating new paths to tax evasion for billionaires. Regrettably, that is what the language in the Republicans' amendment would have done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. The easiest way to solve my colleague's issue would have been to propose an amendment to make sure that we didn't go after taxpayers making less than \$400,000 a year, but not one Democrat did that. All they did was just vote against this and then after the fact say: Well, it was a language issue. If it were simply a language issue, we could have solved it that night.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

INFLATION

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to discuss the crisis that is hitting all Americans. It is a crisis caused by the Democrats. It is a crisis of inflation and a crisis of the recession which we are living.

Right now, it looks like Democrats want to take a victory lap. I have heard the President give his speeches. He seems to want to do this because the Democrats have passed one of the largest tax-and-spend bills in the history of the country. They crammed it through Congress in just a matter of days. It was partisan. It is a liberal wish list. And for some, it seemed like it was a green-haired liberal's dream come true.

The bill includes hundreds of billions of dollars for the radical climate agenda that so many of the Democrats have been talking about. They are going to double the size of the Internal Revenue Service. Audits will be up. It is going to raise taxes on the middle class by tens and tens of billions of dollars.

Democrats, of course, passed this bill on a party-line vote—not a single Republican voted for it in the House or the Senate—and Joe Biden signed it into law. Ever since then, the liberals and the press have been singing Joe Biden's praises.

Yet here is a recent headline that I saw from NBC News. It said:

Democrats reluctant to campaign with Biden—

Reluctant to campaign with Biden. And then the headline goes on—despite the recent winning streak.

Winning streak? There is nothing winning about this. This is a losing streak hitting the American people.

All of this Democratic celebration just shows how out of touch today's Democratic Party really is. Working families aren't celebrating right now.

No. They are struggling—struggling—in this age of inflation and economic crisis.

Here is the reality: We are in a recession. Just last week, the government confirmed the economy has now shrunk for 6 months in a row. It has been the definition of a recession for decade upon decade, no matter what the White House wants to say about how they want to redefine "recession."

Inflation remains at a 40-year high. People can't keep up. They are falling behind. Just this morning, a new Gallup poll came out, and what did it show? Today's Gallup poll showed a majority of Americans saying inflation is causing them personally—them—"financial hardship." That is who is struggling. That is who is hurting most, American families trying to make ends meet.

For low-income Americans, according to this poll by Gallup out today, three out of four are facing financial hardship from the inflation that has been brought on to this country by the Democrats' reckless spending. For the middle class, it is two-thirds, two out of three members of the middle class.

The American people aren't celebrating now. They are having to cut back on their spending because they can't afford to keep up, and they are falling further and further behind. So it is astonishing Democrats think they are on a winning streak.

It is fascinating to watch Joe Biden and Democrats pat themselves on the back because gas prices are now a dollar and a half more a gallon than they were the day Joe Biden took office. In some places, they are less than \$4 a gallon but not in Nevada and Washington State, just to name a few. There is no celebrating, in my opinion, when gas prices are \$1.50 a gallon more today than they were the day Joe Biden took office and then a day after Saudi Arabia announces that they are going to cut back on the production of oil, even though Joe Biden went hat in hand, on bended knee, and said: Please, Saudi Arabia, produce more oil and sell it to the United States because even though we have it here, we are not going to let the American people get it out of the ground.

Democrats haven't lifted a finger to produce one more drop of American oil or American energy. Supply is down from the prepandemic peak. Prices are down right now a little because demand is down because people can't afford to drive at the high prices that gasoline went up to because of Joe Biden's policies and the Democrats' commitment to keeping the oil in the ground.

The American people are driving less in the summer of 2022 than they were in the summer of 2020, and that was the year of the pandemic, when the country was in a shutdown. That is what really high prices of energy will do in terms of demand for using oil.

Increasingly, people not only can't leave home because of the cost of gas,

they can't afford to stay home either. They can't afford to heat their home or cool their home. Half of American homes are powered by natural gas, but Biden's position is, keep that gas in the ground.

Right now, 20 million Americans have fallen behind on paying their electric bills. That is a record. In total, the American people owe more than \$16 billion in unpaid electric bills. It is double the amount owed before the pandemic. And 20 million people may be facing what is called as "a tsunami of shutoffs." It is all because of Democrats' out-of-touch policies.

At the grocery store, prices are up 13 cents on the dollar in the last 12 months. That means a \$100 grocery bill last year would be \$113 this year. I was at the grocery store. A woman had two bags, and she said: Does this look like \$100 worth of groceries? Week after week, this adds up.

This is the fastest increase in grocery prices in 43 years. We are talking about meat and milk and eggs and vegetables. We are talking about fruit—things people buy when they go to the grocery store. Higher costs for gas and groceries are steadily eating away at the finances of the American people.

In total, prices have gone up more than 12 percent since Joe Biden took office. Last week, we learned that prices have increased faster than wages. What people have to pay is going up faster than what people are earning for 16 months in a row. As a result, the American family today can afford a lot less than they could the day Joe Biden took office.

Wages can't keep up so people are turning to their savings and to debt. One out of three Americans has taken an average of \$600 out of their savings this year just to pay the bills to keep up just so they don't fall further behind.

Household debt has never been higher than it is right now, and it is only going up. Half of American families say they expect to add even more to their debt by the end of the year.

So what are Democrats offering working families, people who are out there struggling, trying to get by? The Secretary of Energy has this to offer. She says: Hey, a 30-percent discount on solar panels.

Under the new spending bill, the taxpayer will pay for 30 percent of the cost of those new solar panels—that is taxpayers across the country for people who want to get the 30-percent discount. People can't afford basic groceries like milk and eggs right now, let alone solar panels. Does Secretary Granholm really think middle-class families are running out to buy solar panels? Not a chance. They are not. The American people are saying to the climate extremists: Thanks, but no thanks.

Democrats' inflation is not going away any time soon. The effects are going to be with us for a long, long time. The American people know it.