

get to the bottom of what happened that day and who was responsible for it.

You might remember that there was a proposal from Speaker PELOSI that we create a bipartisan Commission wherein the House and Senate Democrats and Republicans would turn this matter over, as we have before to a group, to determine what happened that day and what was behind it to avoid its ever happening again and to get one clear definition for history from this bipartisan Commission.

The Commission idea was stopped by Senator McCONNELL, the Republican leader in the Senate. He refused to agree on this bipartisan approach. So Speaker PELOSI, realizing she had a scant majority in the House, said that she was going to still try to put such an investigation together. She invited Republican participation, which didn't work out well. Eventually, two stepped forward—Congresswoman CHENEY and Congressman KINZINGER—and said they would participate.

I know ADAM KINZINGER. He is from my State. We have worked on a few things together. I respect him for his political courage time and again to speak out as he has. I am sorry that he was the subject of that censure.

Sadly, that was not the only mistake made in the Salt Lake City Republican revisionary meeting. What was even worse, if anything could be worse, was the declaration by the Republican National Committee that what happened in this building—in this room—on January 6, 2021, was somehow characterized by a unanimous vote as legitimate political discourse.

The Acting President pro tempore remembers that day, and I do, too. I can't forget it. It was when Vice President Pence was sitting where you are today, and a few minutes after 2 o'clock, the Secret Service came in and whisked him off the platform. We were told there was an attack on the Capitol taking place.

Earlier, there had been a rally, sponsored by President Trump, and he had incited this insurrectionist mob to come up to the Capitol to be heard and seen. They knew why that day was chosen. January 6 was the day we were counting the electoral college vote—the official vote on the selection of Joseph Biden as President of the United States. It was the intention of President Trump and those who came here to interrupt that constitutional process.

It is interesting as well that last week, Vice President Pence, at a Federalist Society meeting, spoke out on the subject and said for the first time that I can recall since he was chosen as Vice President that, in fact, President Trump was wrong—wrong in believing that he had the power as Vice President to change the electoral college vote. Pence made it clear that he did not have that authority.

Well, the Republican National Committee went further in trying to pro-

mote the Big Lie and called what happened on January 6 in this Capitol Building legitimate political discourse.

Do they honestly believe that breaking down the windows and doors of this building to enter as an unruly mob is legitimate political discourse?

Do they believe that spraying toxic bear spray in the faces of our policemen is legitimate political discourse?

Do they believe that 140 injured policemen and 5 people who are deceased as a result of that mob action was somehow legitimate political discourse and that, as they came into the Chamber—these demonstrators who were aping themselves in front of cameras for their friends to take pictures—sitting in the chair where the Acting President pro tempore is sitting today and going through my desk and other desks here to see if there was anything they could take a picture of or steal—that that was legitimate political discourse?

Do they believe that incitement to violence by President Trump to send this mob up here was legitimate political discourse?

Shame on the Grand Old Party. Shame on Mr. Lincoln's party. They should know better. I am glad that a handful have stood up and spoken up. I wish more would.

If we are ever going to put an end to Trumpism in this country and in the Republican Party, only the Republicans can get it done. They have to decide that enough is enough and step forward.

It is interesting to me that, when Senator McCONNELL came to the floor a few minutes ago, he talked about the statement of some Big Ten professor—he didn't name his name—who was not respectful of our police. Of all of the things that happened in the last week that were not respectful of the police, I would certainly add the Salt Lake City Republican national meeting, where the attack on our police was characterized as legitimate political discourse. An incitement to violence was legitimate political discourse.

America is better than that. I sincerely hope that real leaders within the Republican Party will reclaim their party and put an end to this madness that Trumpism has brought them.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, on an entirely different subject, on March 26, 2020, America passed a grim milestone when 1,000 Americans died that day of COVID—front page news. Two months later, after Memorial Day, we passed another terrible milestone when 100,000 had died of COVID. As many Americans had died from COVID as from the Korean, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars combined. By this past September, the number of Americans who had been lost to COVID hit 695,000—memorialized in a heart-breaking sea of small, white flags that covered our National Mall. This week-

end, the United States hit another staggering milestone—900,000 Americans dead from COVID. In Illinois, there have been 31,000 lives lost.

COVID-19 is now the third leading cause of death in the United States, behind only heart disease and cancer. At the rate we are going, experts say it is likely the United States will reach 1 million COVID deaths in just a few weeks.

What makes these numbers even more tragic is that so many of the deaths could have been prevented. COVID vaccines are safe and free and highly effective at preventing COVID hospitalization and death. Think about this: According to new data from the CDC, unvaccinated individuals are 97 times more likely to die of COVID compared to those who have been vaccinated and boosted—97 times more likely to die if you are unvaccinated.

Just last night, I watched “60 Minutes.” There was a presentation by nurses in Louisville, KY, the home State of the Republican leader. They talked about the devastating toll on their emotions and even their physical bodies when it comes to the deaths that they have to witness every day. They are beaten down, these nurses. They say that some 25 percent, if I remember correctly, have already resigned and have said they can't take it anymore. And to think how many of those hospitalizations could have been avoided if vaccinations had become universal across this country as they should be.

Well, this evening, Members of Congress will gather on the steps of the Capitol for a moment of silence to remember the 900,000 souls we have lost to this virus. May their families and loved ones find peace.

We have the tools and knowledge to bring this pandemic under control if only we would use them.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, there was another set of numbers that was released last Friday that testifies to good news, and America needs it. It testifies to the resilience of the American people and the American spirit.

Many economists had braced for a disastrous January jobs report. The most optimistic among them predicted that the U.S. economy might grow by 150,000 or maybe 250,000 jobs last month. Some warned that it could show massive job losses. Here is what we learned:

Despite the Omicron surge and the global supply chain shortages, U.S. employers added 467,000 new jobs last month—467,000. On top of that, the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows us the economy added 700,000 more jobs in November and December than we initially calculated. All told, the U.S. economy has added 6.6 million jobs in the last year—the strongest first-year job gain of any President in history.

When Joe Biden took over the office a little over a year ago, he inherited

one of the weakest and fraught economies in generations.

At the start of the pandemic, the U.S. unemployment rate spiked to 14.7 percent. Last February, the Congressional Budget Office forecasted that the United States would not see 3.9 percent unemployment for another 5 years. The unemployment rate now is actually 4 percent. America's economic recovery is breaking records. The United States was the first country in the G7 to recover all of its GDP lost by the pandemic. Average wages were up 5.7 percent last month from a year ago. The increases were not all at the top; workers in the middle and lower rungs of the economy earned more too.

I have to say, as important as that is, we all know that people working in this economy are also facing inflation and higher prices. Whether it is for gasoline or groceries, they are finding it more expensive to meet the basic necessities of life. Although this is good news, that is bad news that we have to address and should address on a bipartisan basis.

The progress that we have made was not inevitable; it was a product of good old-fashioned American ingenuity. It is also the result of bold and decisive economic decisions by the Biden administration.

The American Rescue Plan, which Congress passed without the support of a single Republican Member of Congress—all Democrats all the way—broke the grip of the pandemic on our economy. We were able to get shots in arms, help small businesses stay afloat, and rush emergency assistance to people who had lost jobs or had seen their hours cut drastically. That emergency help worked in Illinois, and it worked all over this country.

We also passed the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Let me remind those who follow, if you are wondering about the infrastructure bill passed by the Trump administration, let me put your concern to rest. There was no bill. There was no legislation. There was no infrastructure plan despite President Trump's repeated promises to deliver one. He walked away from the table, and I was in the room when he did. He wouldn't even negotiate.

We have not fixed all of the weaknesses in our economy. The jobless rate among Black workers is still twice that of White workers. Unemployment among teens and young adults is still too high. Research from the National Women's Law Center shows that, while men have recouped all job losses since the pandemic started, there are nearly 1.1 million fewer women in the workforce. Daycare is part of that calculation, I might add. If we want to reach our full economic potential, we need to help families find affordable, quality daycare, and we have to address the issue of inflation nonstop.

UNITED STATES INNOVATION AND COMPETITION ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, last year, for the first time in more than two decades, America's economy grew faster than China's. That is incredible. Let's keep that streak going by passing USICA, the bipartisan U.S. Innovation and Competition Act. We need to promote products made in the United States by Americans and purchased in the United States. We passed it in the Senate last June by a vote of 2 to 1. The House passed its version last Friday. Let's go to conference and get this bill into law. If we negotiate in good faith, I believe we can do that.

I want to thank Leader SCHUMER and Senator YOUNG, a Republican from Indiana, for their leadership.

This will boost competitiveness with China and help to reindustrialize America, make investments in manufacturing and research, and provide seed money to create good new jobs. Importantly, it includes \$52 billion for research and designing and manufacturing semiconductor chips—what Senator CANTWELL, chair of the Commerce Committee, calls the “oil of the 21st century.” Let's agree to make those chips here in America and not be dependent on importing them from China.

USICA also allows for new sanctions against China for human rights violations. We can stand up for American workers and American values.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

OFFICE OF NET ASSESSMENT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, on November 18 of last year, I came here to speak about the Office of Net Assessment. That is an office within the Pentagon. That office's purpose, under law, is to produce an annual net assessment, which is supposed to be a long-term look at our military's capability and those of our greatest adversaries. I don't think it lives up to its mission.

In 2018, according to the Director of the Office of Net Assessment, that office had not produced a net assessment since 2007. Not doing its job for those 11 years and—who knows—possibly longer calls into question whether this office should even exist. Yet a recent inspector general report states that the office “produces . . . highly classified net assessments.” I question the IG's conclusion based upon available evidence that I know about, and I will give some of that evidence.

In last year's speech here in the Senate and others that I have given over the years on this subject, I discussed my oversight of this office dating back to 2019. I also discussed my amendment to the national defense bill. That amendment would have done one very simple thing: required the Government Accountability Office to determine how much taxpayer money the Office of Net Assessment actually uses for net assessment—its purpose for existing. I want to know how much we can cut from their budget to save the taxpayers money.

Apparently, this type of pro-taxpayer legislation was too much to ask for. Accordingly, it appears that the Office of Net Assessment in the Department of Defense gets to keep operating like a Pentagon slush fund for irrelevant and political research projects.

On February 5, 2020, the Director of the Office of Net Assessment told me:

We review all deliverables to ensure they're consistent with the statement of work. We evaluate each deliverable to assess whether we should seek additional information or require a resubmission of commissioned work.

Now, I am going to return to that statement in a little bit, but I want to give you some evidence of why what he said doesn't work out in reality.

In December 2020, I asked the inspector general to take a deeper dive into the Office of Net Assessment's contracting practices. That means connecting all the dots in the contract transactions to ensure that everything matches up. The inspector general reviewed 20 contracts. On January 25 of this year, the inspector general issued its results and found these three or four points:

Office of Net Assessment acquisition personnel inappropriately performed contracting officer representative duties for 20 contracts.

Next point. Office of Net Assessment acquisition personnel and an office providing contract support did not maintain complete contract files, including preawards and contract administration documentation. That also included the failure to maintain signed contracts and modifications. Since 2019, I have repeatedly asked for a full accounting of Stefan Halper's contracts. Either they never had one or they have decided to obstruct Congress.

Next point. Office of Net Assessment acquisition personnel and an office providing contract support inappropriately approved invoices for payments totaling \$9.8 million dollars due to the lack of oversight. And that is just for the 20 contracts the inspector general sampled. So without required supporting documentation for payment, the door is, obviously, wide open to fraud, theft, and improper payments.

Next point. Without established and documented surveillance measures for Office of Net Assessment service contracts, the Office of Net Assessment may not have received all services outlined in a contractor's statement of work.