

tear them down, the Justices have proven their sobriety and judicial temperament over their long and distinguished careers.

#### VEHICLE EMISSIONS

Mr. President, now on another matter, today, the senior Senator from Nebraska will advance a resolution to push back on the Biden administration's war against American energy and American industry.

Senator FISCHER's resolution responds to the Biden administration's new plan to hike already stringent vehicle emission standards even higher. This latest rule on nitrogen oxide emissions takes direct aim at the sort of trucks and heavy equipment that literally drive our entire economy.

Back in 2021, climate activists got the President to invoke "environmental justice" in an Executive order rolling out its so-called Clean Trucks Plan. The same bureaucrats who can't control inflation or secure the border want to even more closely micro-manage the heavy vehicles allowed on our roads. Never mind that the nitrogen oxide emissions of new trucks on the market are already—listen to this—already 98 to 99 percent lower than they were as recently as the late 1990s.

By the EPA's own estimates, the new technology required to meet the latest arbitrary benchmarks could jack up truck prices by as much as \$8,304 each—each.

Listen to what the truckers themselves have to say:

If small business owners can't afford the new, compliant trucks, they're going to stay with older, less-efficient trucks, or leave the industry entirely.

Leave the industry entirely? Higher priced trucks, fewer drivers, higher costs for consumer goods—that is an outcome working families and supply chains simply can't stomach.

So I want to express my gratitude to Senator FISCHER for bringing this resolution forward. I would urge each of our colleagues to support it.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, one of President Biden's favorite things to talk about is giving families "a little bit of breathing room." It is a phrase he uses frequently, just as he also frequently talks about growing the economy "from the middle out and the bottom up, not from the top down."

He used both phrases in a speech just last week. And, frankly, it is somewhat staggering to me that he continues to talk like this, because the Biden economy is the story of taking away Ameri-

cans' breathing room. It is a story of declining purchasing power for lower and middle-income families, of wages that don't keep pace with increased costs, of stretched budgets and difficult spending decisions. President Biden has presided over a historic inflation crisis that has left American families struggling just to keep up. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in February 2023, a cost-effective nutritious meal plan for a family of four cost \$979.40 per month.

Two years earlier, that same family would have had to spend \$674.80. That is a 45-percent increase—a 45-percent increase. The Biden economy is costing that family of four an additional \$304 a month for groceries, or \$3,655 per year more. And, again, that is just on groceries.

I don't need to tell anyone that prices have risen across the board, 15.4 percent on average since President Biden took office, and American families are feeling the pinch. A recent CNBC survey found that 70 percent of Americans are feeling financially stressed—70 percent—and that the majority of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. And it is no surprise, given that inflation has outpaced wage growth for 24 straight months—meaning that under the Biden administration, Americans have received a de facto pay cut.

Americans are cutting back on spending, dipping into savings, or charging expenses to their credit card to help make ends meet. Bloomberg reports on a growing trend of relying on "buy now, pay later" apps for everyday purchases, noting that and I quote:

U.S. consumers are increasingly using such installment loans to pay for everyday items like groceries, highlighting the financial pain wrought by the worst inflation outbreak in four decades.

Credit card debt hit a record high in the final quarter of 2022, and nearly half of Americans are carrying balances now from month to month. More than two-thirds of Americans are saving less than they did a year ago. And the list goes on. Put simply, if President Biden wanted to create more breathing room for Americans, he has failed. In fact, President Biden has taken away Americans' breathing room, and there is little relief in sight.

Now, I don't need to tell anyone that one of the main reasons we are in the midst of this inflation crisis is because of Democrats and the President's decision to pass the so-called American Rescue Plan Act, which was a massive and partisan \$1.9 trillion spending spree that flooded our economy with unnecessary government money.

Democrats were warned that their bill would cause inflation, and they proceeded anyway. And the economy overheated as a result. Even worse, despite steadily climbing inflation in the wake of their bill, Democrats seemed determined not to recognize their mistake. Instead of acknowledging their oversized spending bill helped set off

inflation, Democrats kept pursuing more spending and more damaging economic policies.

There is the \$5 trillion big government vision they called Build Back Better but should probably have been named more aptly "Build Back Broke" or "Bankrupt," the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, which has done nothing to address inflation but has imposed a series of new taxes that are driving up Americans' energy costs.

The President's reckless student loan giveaway, which could end up costing American taxpayers close to a trillion dollars. And there is more. And the bad ideas just keep coming.

The President recently released his budget proposal, which would increase spending every year until the Federal budget reaches an eye-watering \$10 trillion in the year 2033—\$10 trillion. For comparison, let me just point out that the entire Federal budget for 2019—and that is the last budget before the pandemic—was \$4.4 trillion—\$4.4 trillion.

President Biden wants to more than double that; \$4.4 trillion to \$10 trillion. And then there is the latest idea from the White House, which is punishing Americans with good credit scores if they purchase a house. That is right. Think about this one: The Biden administration has announced a new policy which is set to go into effect on May 1st that would impose higher mortgage fees on Americans with higher credit scores, and the highest fees on Americans who make a substantial downpayment.

Now if you save and are able to make a 20 percent downpayment on a home, you are going to pay more under the Biden administration plan.

These higher fees would then go to subsidize mortgages for Americans with lower credit scores. In other words, think about it this way: The Biden administration is targeting hard-working Americans who save, diligently pay their bills, and build good credit, in order to subsidize mortgages for higher risk borrowers.

It is the microcosm of Biden's big government policies. Punish hard work, punish financial discipline, punish success, and redistribute the wealth. Squeeze middle-class Americans. Force hard-working taxpayers to fund Democrats' socialist visions.

We literally are socializing mortgage payments. That is what it amounts to. Nothing more, nothing less. Because, let's be very clear, President Biden likes to talk about forcing better-off Americans to pay for his policies, and he likes to claim that he isn't going to raise taxes on Americans making less than \$400,000 a year. But this new mortgage policy is going to hit thousands and thousands of middle-class Americans making ordinary salaries whose only crime is that they worked hard, saved money, and have been responsible with their debt.

The President can talk all he likes about making wealthy Americans pay



their fair share, the truth is that it is lower and middle-income Americans who are suffering as a result of the President's economic policies.

This summer another big economic issue will come into play: The debt limit. Sometime in the next few months, the United States will reach the limit of its borrowing capacity, and Congress will have to pass—and the President will have to sign—legislation to raise the debt ceiling to enable the United States to pay our debts. Needless to say, that will require negotiations between the President and Congress, something the President has so far refused to engage in.

Why? Because the President doesn't want an increase in the debt limit to be paired with any measures that might cut spending or actually do something to reduce the debt.

I suppose that is not a surprising position from someone who wants to grow government, increase the size of the Federal budget to a staggering \$10 trillion, but it is a deeply problematic position—both because it ignores the increasing danger represented by our ever-increasing national debt and because it is an unrealistic position.

In a divided government, a refusal to negotiate cannot be an option. And if the President doesn't want to go down in history as the President who forced the United States to default on its debt, he needs to start engaging in negotiations.

House Republicans are putting forward a serious bill to restrain excess spending while protecting the full faith and credit of the United States. The President needs to join the Speaker at the negotiating table. Responsible spending reforms might not undo the economic damage the President has done, but they could put us on a more sustainable and less-damaging path for the future. And they could spare Americans some of the economic pain that would result from more of President Biden's reckless government spending.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO MICHAEL ZAMORE

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, it was John Quincy Adams who once said:

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

For the last 14 years, the members of my team have had an outstanding leader in our chief of staff, Michael Zamore, who has constantly and consistently inspired the team and me to dream, to grow, to strive to do better every single day for ourselves and the people we serve.

But after nearly a decade and a half, as the heart and soul of Team Merkley and more than 22 years on Capitol Hill, Mr. Zamore has decided to close this chapter of his life and career and set off to begin writing the next chapter. I know I speak for many when I say how hard it is to imagine our office or the Senate without Mike Zamore.

Mike has been with me from the very beginning. He was one of the small crew working out of the temporary basement office the day I was sworn in. Five new Members of the Senate and a couple of staff members crowded into a single, little, expanded room downstairs, trying to figure out what we were doing, how to get around.

Where are those hearing rooms? How do we get the paper for the printers? How do we get staples for the staplers?

He has been a pivotal part of every success that our team has achieved since, and there have been a lot of legislative highlights in the time that he has led Team Merkley—to name just a few: outlawing predatory mortgages; passing financial reform to shut down the Wall Street proprietary trading casino; winning Senate passage of ENDA, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, to end job discrimination against our LGBTQ+ community; drafting and introducing the Equality Act to end LGBTQ discrimination across the board; leading the effort to end the horrific Trump policy of ripping children out of their parents' arms at the border; ending the importation of Chinese products produced with slave labor; and so many more and so many different initiatives to improve healthcare, to establish more decent and affordable housing, to expand quality education, and to increase the number of good-paying jobs for working Americans.

But it isn't just policy that is relevant to the role of a chief of staff. Mike has worked to ensure that our team has the best operation for answering constituents' letters to be found on Capitol Hill, to empower the Oregon half of our operation to build a fabulous constituent services team and an excellent set of field representatives to work with Oregon's counties and cities to address the challenges and opportunities within our State, and to keep our DC team and our Oregon team working closely together as one.

He did this through many trips to the State and by encouraging staff here in DC to travel and be in Oregon as well and by ensuring we connected and coordinated through weekly all-staff meetings and that we connected through biannual retreats: getting everyone together face-to-face with the Oregon team and the DC team, spending time together to know one another, enjoy each other's company, and expand the connections that lead to successful progress forward on issue after issue.

And because we like to be a team that not only works hard but plays hard, Mike always had a little special

presentation for those occasions when we were all gathered together, on one occasion dressing up in colonial garb to perform a special Team Merkley rendition of a song from "Hamilton" or, on another occasion, doing a sea shanty during our nautical-themed virtual retreat. In doing these presentations, he proved himself to be a far, far braver man than most of the rest of us, but I know that that extra bit of effort has always been beloved by everyone on the team.

His most lasting legacy will be through the talented individuals he has carefully recruited to be members of our team over the last 14-plus years and the way that he inspired them and led them, with heart and humility, imbuing them with the same passion for public service that has guided Mike throughout his entire career.

I believe we have had one of the most energetic, capable, and motivated teams ever assembled on Capitol Hill, and that is because we have had one of the most energetic, capable, and motivated chiefs of staff in Mike Zamore.

As chief, Mike worked hard to champion and reinforce specific values. One of them that has resonated over the years is the idea of continuous self-improvement—the idea that none of us are perfect and never will be and that we should always be striving to be better ourselves as individuals and as a team.

Mike never exempted himself from that same spirit of continual self-improvement. He sought out and welcomed honest feedback from everyone, from the newest intern to the most senior staffer, on how he was doing and how the office was doing and how we could do better.

Jack Welch, the former head of GE, once said:

When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.

Mike has always cared deeply about helping the members of our team grow. That is why he has always loved outside-the-box thinking, like when a staff member suggested that I should hop on a plane and go down to the border to find out for myself what was really happening with the administration's zero-tolerance family separation policy. It is why he enthusiastically embraced and championed our office's mission of inclusivity and was so supportive of the creation of a diversity, equity, and inclusion committee. Our DE&I team members have created learning opportunities, and they share information to educate and inform the rest of the team about a wide range of issues, and they work to inspire honest, open, and sometimes uncomfortable dialogues so that we can all be the best versions of ourselves and so that we can serve all of the people of Oregon with the highest level of respect and responsiveness.

It is why his door was always open for what he called "Z hours," when folks would come in and talk about anything whether it was work related or not.