

The office and Team Merkley won't be the same without Mike. It won't be the same without the ringer on his phone quacking like a duck and interrupting meetings. It won't be the same without our office mascot—Mike's loving husky, Juneau—around to brighten everyone's day.

The writer Walter Lippmann noted:

The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind in others the conviction and will to carry on.

And I can tell you that the values of service, compassion, and humility that Mike has enshrined in the heart of Team Merkley will carry on because the folks whom he has painstakingly brought together have the conviction and will to do so.

Thank you, Mike. Thank you for all you have done for the team, all you have done for the Senate, and all you have done in advocating for policies to make our State, our country, and the world a better place. We wish you and your family the best as you start writing that next chapter of your life.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

VEHICLE EMISSIONS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I rise today in opposition to a resolution that has been presented to overturn the EPA's lifesaving heavy-duty NO_x rule.

Across the country, heavy-duty vehicles, including trucks and buses, make up one-third of all transportation NO_x emissions. Now, this is the same source of smog and soot that darkens skies in many communities and certainly poisons the lungs of too many Americans.

In an effort to address those real challenges, the EPA's heavy-duty vehicle pollution rule is projected to cut NO_x emissions from the heavy-duty sector by nearly half over the next dozen years. This represents a monumental investment and significant step forward in our Nation's health and air quality that will benefit all Americans. But instead of supporting this rule, some Members have suggested that we reverse course and instead leave in place an outdated pollution standard—a rule that even the heavy-duty vehicle industry acknowledges is too weak—and, in so doing, endanger the lives of thousands of Americans. This makes no sense.

Consider the Inland Empire in Southern California. Truly this region, this geographical area, is the heart of our Nation's supply chain. No one in the Inland Empire wants the economy to shutter, but residents in the region know all too well the dangers that surround them. Children's playgrounds, veterans health centers, schools, and entire neighborhoods are surrounded

by warehouses and distribution centers. Now, the warehouses in and of themselves aren't threatening our air quality or public health, but think about the emissions from the trucks that carry goods to and from those warehouses. As a result, communities throughout the Inland Empire, which happen to also be mostly Latino and low-income communities, experience higher rates of asthma, decreased lung function in children, and higher rates of cancer. It is not hyperbole. The data is there. Statistics are clear.

It is not just the Inland Empire. I raise that as the most significant example. In fact, it is communities all across the country near freight corridors that are impacted—almost 72 million people who live near freight routes.

So yes, Mr. President, I am standing up for the fundamental human right to clean air for all Americans.

Now, truth be told, I actually wanted the EPA to be more ambitious in its final NO_x rule and to align more closely with California's stringent heavy-duty vehicle rules. California proudly leads the Nation in decarbonization and emissions reduction, and we have done so by working thoughtfully and collectively with industry and communities to cut deadly NO_x and other pollution from vehicles while we transition to zero-emission vehicles.

So to my colleagues who claim negative business or economic impacts, California is doing this while having just grown from being the fifth largest economy in the world to the fourth largest economy in the world. Economic growth and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive. Economic growth and protecting public health are not mutually exclusive. We can and must do it all together.

Last I checked from business leaders whom I talked to—I mentioned industries at the table and also at the State level—they actually appreciate that regulatory certainty that I know you and I have talked about, Mr. President, where we lay out a rule, an agenda, a policy objective, and work together to create a plan to achieve it and keep that plan, not ripsaw back and forth about what regulations are going to be in place from one year to the next, from one congressional majority to the next, et cetera.

I am also continuing to push the EPA to finalize a strong phase 3 heavy-duty vehicle rule with my clean air and clean transportation partners in the Senate, including Chairman CARPER of the Environment and Public Works Committee and Senator MARKEY and others.

But, at the very least, we can't undercut two decades of progress we have already made, and this CRA undermines the scientific and technical expertise behind these important standards and public health protections. And we know that the CRA is part of a bigger effort to stop the bold action we are taking to tackle the climate crisis.

So, colleagues, for the sake of clean air, for the sake of our environment, and for the sake of the health of all communities across the country, I urge you to oppose this repeal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent to be able to complete my remarks before the vote.

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

DEBT CEILING

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this week, the House is expected to vote on legislation to begin to rein in Congress's out-of-control spending and avoid a debt default. As the American people know, this is a critical task that has become more urgent by the day.

The United States hit its debt limit, basically maxing out on our national credit card. We maxed out on our credit card in January, and the Treasury Department has been using what they call "extraordinary measures" to prevent the government from defaulting on its debt. Because it depends on how much revenue is coming in the front door from taxes, we don't know exactly when these measures will be exhausted, but experts say it could happen as soon as June, which is only 1 month away. So clearly it is time to get serious about solutions.

From the beginning of this discussion and debate, two things have become abundantly clear: One, default should be avoided at all costs. This is something that Republicans and Democrats both agree to. Our economy is still stabilizing from the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, our banking system has endured two high-profile collapses, and inflation continues to wreak havoc on family budgets.

The latest RealClearPolitics average for the Biden administration's handling of the economy says that only about 37 percent of the American people believe President Biden has done a good job on the economy. So clearly they are feeling vulnerable to any shocks to the economy that might occur should the debt limit not be passed.

We know that if the United States defaults on these debts, all of our challenges will only get worse. Social Security and Medicare benefits would be delayed. Members of the military and Federal employees would not get paid. We could see skyrocketing mortgage rates, sinking stock prices, and an instability all across our economy.

In short, this is not a time for a game of chicken; this is a time for responsible people to step up and to do their job. A default is the very last thing our country needs, and Congress and the administration need to act before it is too late.

I am glad we agree on that point, but the second point is where there is clearly a difference of opinion. It is clear that America's borrowing and spending are unsustainable. With \$31

trillion in national debt and almost \$1 trillion a year being spent on interest to pay the bondholders who hold that debt, we know we can't continue down this path. National debt has catapulted from \$3.2 trillion in 1980 to \$9.7 trillion in 2000. Today, it is \$31.7 trillion. Those numbers are so big, I am sure most of us have difficulty grasping them, assuming we could at all—\$31.7 trillion in debt.

While the national debt poses a significant economic risk, it also invites significant security risks. Every day, America is spending more and more money on interest payments—like I said, about \$1 trillion for the bondholders who own that debt. Each dollar that goes toward servicing the debt is a dollar that can't be spent on other priorities, like keeping America safe.

For years, our top defense officials have warned about the risk of the national debt continuing to grow. In 2010, I remember then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen said:

The most significant threat to our national security is our debt.

Since then, our national debt has more than doubled. That trend is not going to change on its own. It requires a change of behavior—behavior by the administration and by Members of the U.S. Congress. We need to act as soon as possible to rein in out-of-control spending and protect America's long-term financial stability and our national security. Future generations are going to have to pay that money back, and we ought to do everything we can to avoid that result, if there are things we can do at least to mitigate it.

So these are the two basic truths that the majority of Americans agree on: A default is unacceptable, and secondly, we need to get our fiscal house in order. Unfortunately, President Biden refuses to engage on either one. This is really unbelievable to me. The President of the United States, the leader of the free world, and he said: Eh, not my problem. How irresponsible, how reckless is that?

From the beginning, President Biden drew outrageous redlines and tried to dictate what a solution would look like. And, actually, it wasn't a solution; it was just a patch. The President ruled out any negotiations over spending reforms and said he expected Congress to raise the debt limit with no conditions attached.

We know that any bank or credit union in America that issues a credit card—that once you have maxed out on your credit limit, they want to know: OK, if you want us to raise that limit, you are going to have to tell us how you are going to pay the money back that you already owe. But President Biden said: No, we want to keep spending, and we want to keep raising the debt limit, but we don't want to do anything about reforming spending or changing the curve when it comes to reining in spending.

These unrealistic declarations by the President don't make him look tough;

they just make him look out of touch. Just because President Biden wants something doesn't mean it will happen.

As the President knows, Democrats no longer control both Chambers of Congress. During the first 2 years, the President could snap his fingers and expect Democrats to advance his agenda without a single Republican vote. And that happened, most recently on two bills which are partisan bills that added \$2.7 trillion to our national debt. And now the President says: It is not my problem.

Well, this isn't a monarchy. We got rid of a King a long time ago. This isn't the Biden empire, and the President's wishes can only count for so much.

The reality of the situation is that any solution to the debt ceiling must be bipartisan and bicameral. It has to be approved by a Republican-led House and a Democrat-led Senate and a Democrat President. Right now, President Biden's clean debt ceiling increase simply has no way to pass.

So we are at an impasse, and there is only one way forward; that is, the President must do what Presidents have always done before this time, and that means come to the negotiating table. That is the only way to avert a debt crisis that both political parties want to avoid.

For months, Republicans have urged President Biden to sit down with Speaker MCCARTHY and hammer a compromise.

Other than a single meeting where they literally touch gloves and then walked away, like two boxers in a ring, the President has been completely absent without leave. He has been AWOL.

He continues to parrot demands that he knows are unreasonable and impractical, and he refuses to acknowledge the reality of the problem.

Well, since President Biden took office a little over 2 years ago, he has been on a spending bender. He pushed Democrats in Congress to pass two massive partisan bills that I mentioned a moment ago, totaling about \$2.7 trillion. These were strictly party-line votes by Democrats, with no Republican support, that added \$2.7 trillion to the debt, and now President Biden said: Not my problem once the debt ceiling has hit.

He stuck taxpayers for a ridiculous set of pet projects, everything from handouts for labor unions to subsidies for wealthy people so they would buy electric vehicles, even though most Americans can't afford one.

President Biden didn't just rely on Democrats to indulge his spending habits; he also ran off with the taxpayers' credit card by himself.

The President single-handedly claimed to be able to spend \$460 billion in an Executive order erasing student loans off the books for tens of millions of borrowers. That case is now pending in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Clearly, he does not have that authority, but he claimed to have it, and now we have a case pending before the Supreme Court to decide that.

So President Biden, in addition to the \$2.7 trillion in partisan spending bills, has no trouble adding to that debt by another \$460 billion. But he doesn't want to negotiate the debt ceiling increase. He doesn't want to talk about how do we get back on a glide-path to more responsible spending habits.

Despite the President's record of spending like there is no tomorrow, he refuses to talk about spending reforms—at least so far. He said he won't even entertain the idea that this is a topic worth discussing with the Speaker of the House.

As I said, that is a completely reckless and irresponsible position to take, and even members of the President's own party are lining up to criticize him. The Senator from Minnesota, Senator KLOBUCHAR, recently said that President Biden should sit down with Speaker MCCARTHY. Senator KLOBUCHAR is right. Congresswoman DEBBIE DINGELL, in the House of Representatives, said that the administration can't keep waiting. Senator MANCHIN, from West Virginia, went so far as to criticize the President's refusal to sit down with Speaker MCCARTHY as a deficiency in leadership.

With a potential default on the horizon, it is time for President Biden to change his tune. He needs to abandon this reckless "my way or the highway" attitude and sit down and do what Presidents have always done, and that is to negotiate a solution.

From the beginning, it was obvious to everybody that a bipartisan compromise was the only path forward. That is the most fundamental tenet of divided government. Nobody can do it by themselves, so you have to work out solutions together.

It is simply unacceptable for any President to stand by with these kinds of outrageous redlines when we are potentially just weeks away from a possible default, considering, especially, the fragility of the economy as it currently exists. And this would make it catastrophic.

So President Biden has wasted months already with his reckless position, and it is time to get moving. I appreciate Speaker MCCARTHY's efforts to break the stalemate and get President Biden to join him at the negotiating table.

I will repeat, in closing, the only way to avoid a debt crisis is through a bipartisan negotiation. Republicans have known that all along. Many Democrats are now acknowledging that as well, and it is time for President Biden to get the message.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON JACOBS NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senate and advise the consent to the Jacobs nomination?

Mr. COONS. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.