

solved the problem. He has just swept it under the rug, and he has, arguably, made it worse.

This crisis is complex, but the solution isn't. The administration needs to engage with Congress and enforce our immigration laws that are on the books and those that are being exploited by the international criminal networks that are smuggling people into the United States on a daily basis.

We need to work together to address those gaps that are being exploited. If migrants from any country see that the United States is quickly detaining and removing people who do not have a legal basis to remain in our country, the flow of illegal immigration will drop dramatically. That is the only viable path forward and where the administration should focus its time and effort.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

#### BRISTOL BAY

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise today to applaud the Biden administration and their historic step to permanently protect Bristol Bay, AK. More than a decade after the Pebble Mine was proposed, the Environmental Protection Agency, today, is finalizing a Clean Water Act protection that will permanently protect Bristol Bay. No company will ever be able to stick a mine on top of some of the best salmon habitat in the world.

Salmon fishermen from Alaska and from my home State of Washington will continue to earn their livelihoods from Bristol Bay salmon, as they have for generations. No Bristol Bay salmon will ever have to swim through toxic soup just to get to its spawning grounds.

This scientific decision today by the Environmental Protection Agency puts a final nail in this mine's proposal.

It is difficult to understand and to really know the importance of Bristol Bay. In an average year, 40 to 60 million sockeye salmon swim into or out of the bay. Last year was a blockbuster run. Nearly 80 million sockeye salmon returned to Bristol Bay.

That is why Bristol Bay is known as the holy grail of salmon. Today, Bristol Bay salmon fisheries are a \$2.2 billion annual industry. They support over 15,000 jobs in the Pacific Northwest and nationwide, and that is through commercial fishing, recreational fishing, tourism, seafood, restaurants, shipbuilding, and other associated industries.

I know the Presiding Officer knows this well because northern California also benefits from these salmon sectors and the salmon industry.

Salmon are one of the most important products that we in the Pacific Northwest have. It is the symbol of our region. So Bristol Bay salmon, being a powerhouse and supporting nearly half of the sockeye salmon harvested

around the globe, is certainly worth fighting for.

So, as you can imagine, when a mining corporation decided to try to build a mine in the headwaters of this most powerful salmon run on the planet, fishermen in my State and in many other States were outraged. Estuaries and mines really don't mix, and they certainly don't belong together at the headwaters of one of the most important salmon runs and spawning grounds in the Nation.

For fishermen, the destruction wrought by Pebble Mine would have swept away their businesses and their way of life, and they certainly raised their voices and came to ask me and others in Washington for help.

In 2011, I was proud to stand with fishermen and Tribes from my State and from Alaska to speak out against Pebble Mine and to call for permanent protections under the Clean Water Act if the science showed that the mine would have irreversible impacts on salmon. Well, sure enough, the science is damning, and that is what is being released as part of this decision today.

In 2020, the Environmental Protection Agency found that more than 185 miles of streams and over 3,800 acres of wetlands would be permanently damaged or destroyed by Pebble Mine due to its toxic waste and habitat destruction, and that is just if the mine operated the way it was supposed to. That wasn't considering the kind of degradation that could happen if an accident happened. Those statistics don't account for a potential mine disaster that could really wipe out this irreplaceable ecosystem.

So despite the clear science, the mining company has continued to claim that protecting Bristol Bay is a partisan government overreach. Their executives believe that stripping all the gold and copper out of Bristol Bay is a worthy goal, more important than our wild salmon or more important than the generations of Washington and Alaska fishermen who earn their livelihood from that.

Protecting our fishing economy should not be a partisan issue, and that is why Congress created a fail-safe Clean Water Act provision called section 404(c). This provision says that if disposal or dredging in a waterway would destroy fisheries, municipal water, or have other serious impacts, the Environmental Agency could step in to stop the project.

It is a simple concept, really: Let's not destroy a profitable, sustainable industry that keeps the water clean for the sake of just temporary extracting.

Still, this authority in 404(c) isn't used lightly. Since 1972, millions of Clean Water Act permits have been approved, compared to only 14 times that this provision has been used to stop major projects like the one today that is being stopped at Pebble Mine.

Republican Presidents have used this Clean Water 404(c) authority 11 times. Let me say that again.

It has only been implemented 14 times in our history, and 11 times it was used by a Republican President. Ronald Reagan alone used the Clean Water Act 404 authority 8 times.

So there was a time when people believed in this conservation. They believed in making sure that we preserve what is so unique about our planet.

To sum it up, a multinational corporation thought that it could go to one of the most iconic salmon runs on the planet and decimate those jobs that we rely on in Bristol Bay and tear a hole in the culture of our Northwest fabric. And fishermen and we here said: No.

I am proud of the scientific work done by the Environmental Protection Agency under President Biden, the University of Washington, and so many of the environmental partners that fought so hard to stop this project.

I am proud to have stood with the fishermen and Tribes of Bristol Bay in saying we need to protect this unique place forever.

I want to thank some of our greatest champions: The United Tribes of Bristol Bay, the Bristol Bay Native Corporation, and the fishing families in Alaska and Washington.

I want to thank my staff, Nikki Teutschel, Amit Ronen, and Jeff Watters, who, through a decade, all continued this fight to make sure that every administration was listening to this cause.

It seemed like a "David and Goliath" many times, this battle, but we know today that the voices of fishermen at Bristol Bay provided the leadership that we needed to preserve this area forever and said no to this project.

Fishermen know that the Pacific Northwest salmon is worth more than copper, and today, salmon is even worth more than gold. It is our Pacific way of life, and thanks to this administration, it will be protected.

I yield the floor.

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. DURBIN. 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.

The Democratic whip.

#### DEBT CEILING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it took 15 votes for KEVIN MCCARTHY to become Speaker of the House of Representatives. It may not have been historic, but it was a sight to behold. To finally become Speaker, KEVIN MCCARTHY made all kinds of commitments to the MAGA extremists in his Republican Party.

One of the promises he made to the hard-right holdouts in order to become Speaker was that House Republicans

would use their razor-thin majority in the House to try to freeze Federal spending in fiscal year 2024 to fiscal year 2022 levels. Let me bring that down in plain English. This means cutting \$130 billion out of the Federal budget that Congress just passed last month—\$130 billion is nothing to sneeze at.

Now, how are they going to do it? What is on the Republican agenda in terms of cuts? Speaker MCCARTHY won't say and neither will the House Republicans. What they have said is they plan to use the debt ceiling as leverage to try to get their way.

What is the debt ceiling?

Let me give you an example. Last night, you went to a restaurant with your family. You had a wonderful meal, and you paid for it with your credit card. In a couple weeks you are going to get a bill from your credit card company saying now it is time to pay for that wonderful meal. That is our debt ceiling.

If we don't pay those bills on a timely basis, it raises the question as to whether we are credible or reliable, and those people who loan us money, if they worry about whether the United States is going to pay its debts, they are going to demand higher interest rates to protect their purchase of U.S. securities. That is the bottom line.

We have never—underline “never”—defaulted on our national debt and debt ceiling in our history. As a consequence, the United States enjoys a solid reputation for financial stability. Well, Speaker MCCARTHY has decided to put that on the chopping block.

Let's get right up to the eleventh hour and see if we are going to extend the debt ceiling. It is within his power to stop it, and that is his threat. What we have said to him is: If you have something, a plan for cutting spending or raising taxes, which is unlikely—if you have a plan for cutting spending, be honest with us and tell us what it is.

Some of the proposals are incredible. There is an actual proposal to create a Federal—that is national—sales tax of—listen—30 percent. A 30-percent sales tax. So if that loaf of bread cost five bucks at the grocery store—and in Springfield, some of them do—instead of paying \$5, you will pay \$6.50. Did you think prices were already going up for food in the grocery store? Tack on 30 percent and see how it feels.

And the problem with this is not just the notion of a national sales tax of 30 percent; the problem is, who will pay it. Do you think the richest people in the world give a toot about grocery bills? They don't. But folks who are struggling paycheck to paycheck, trying to feed hungry kids, do. They can tell you week to week what is going on in the grocery store, and it is not very encouraging.

So one of the Republican plans for reducing Federal spending is creating a national sales tax of 30 percent. I am not making this up. This is one of the proposals which Speaker MCCARTHY

has agreed to call as part of his response to the debt of the United States. MAGA Republicans are threatening to use the credit worthiness of the United States as a bargaining chip in a political debate here on Capitol Hill. And, I am sorry to say, if they go the direction we expect they will, it will go beyond a national sales tax.

They are talking about cuts in some of the most important entitlement programs in our budget. What are those programs? Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, veterans' benefits. The list goes on. And it gets down into the heart of this economy. It gets down to whether or not the vast majority of retirees in the United States of America will have enough money to get by. Food bills are going up, the gasoline bills have gone up in the past, and this idea that we are going to cut Social Security benefits—the Republicans are on the wrong track.

Refusing to pay America's bills for the first time actually won't cut the national debt. It will end up in increasing interest rates and will increase the debt by \$80 to \$150 billion, and that is just a start. Millions of Americans can lose their jobs, and it can push us into a recession if we default on the debt. Workers with 401(k) plans will see huge losses in their retirement savings, and a new 30-year mortgage on a home will cost an additional \$130,000, on average. Are people going to buy homes? Not likely. But people who own homes will see the values of those homes diminished, all because of this reckless strategy of confrontation by Speaker MCCARTHY.

One-quarter of our entire national debt—that is \$8 trillion worth of debt—was accumulated during the administration of Donald Trump. One-fourth of the entire debt of the United States in its 230 years of existence—one-fourth of it—was accumulated in those 4 years. Of course, there was money spent on the COVID crisis. I understand that. But there was also a \$2 trillion tax cut under President Donald Trump. Who got the tax cut? Most of it went to the wealthiest people in America and the biggest corporations. It is the tried and true Republican approach—cut taxes on the rich and hope for the best.

The last time the United States had a balanced Federal budget, incidentally—was it under a Republican President? No, it was a Democrat, Bill Clinton. The fiscal year 2001 Federal budget had a \$128 billion surplus. Remember what Republicans' fear about the deficit was back then? They told us. The Republicans claimed that paying down the national debt too quickly would hurt the economy. They were critical of us in either direction—either too much debt or not enough.

So instead of using the fiscal year 2001 surplus as a downpayment on the national debt, Republicans—you guessed it—passed a huge tax cut in those days overwhelmingly benefiting rich people and powerful corporations. They said, and they always say this:

Those tax cuts will pay for themselves—the same bogus claims they make about all their big tax cuts for the wealthy. Instead, 7 years later, the last budget George W. Bush sent to Congress contained a \$1.4 trillion deficit.

The same thing happened when Ronald Reagan was President. Republicans passed huge tax cuts for the wealthy and promised that they would pay for themselves. If we could just get the rich a little richer, then working families would be better off. Instead, they produced the biggest budget deficit that America had ever seen.

So do they have a credibility gap on that side of the aisle when it comes to deficits? They sure do.

Rich Lowry, the editor-in-chief of the *National Review*, once the “Bible” of American conservatives, commented on what the MAGA strategy means. In an op-ed last week, he wrote:

It's very strange not to seriously pursue a deeply held goal when you have unified control of Washington, then to insist on trying to achieve much of it in one fell swoop when you barely have control of one chamber in Congress.

But here we are. This is the Republican pattern.

In the last fiscal year, under President Biden and a Democratic majority, we actually reduced the deficit by \$1.4 trillion, the largest 1-year drop in American history under President Biden.

Democrats passed the Inflation Reduction Act to reduce the cost of healthcare, prescription drugs, and energy for American families, and to strengthen our Nation's energy independence with safe, new energy solutions.

The Inflation Reduction Act also cuts the deficit by more than \$300 billion. We are not ignoring the problem. We are trying to address it seriously—the smart way to reduce the deficit: cut where you can, invest where you must, and make sure it is fair for middle-class and lower income families, not a boondoggle for the superrich in America.

President Biden kept his promise to not raise taxes on anyone making under \$400,000. Democrats added a 15-percent minimum tax for wealthy corporations. It just was hard to take that these wealthy corporations and profitable corporations were paying nothing on taxes—that is right, nothing—leaving the middle class to pick up the tab in America.

Compare that to the new MAGA majority in the House. During their first week on the job, House Republicans proposed to increase the budget deficit by \$100 billion by making it easier for wealthy individuals and big corporations to cheat on their taxes.

Think about this: The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities says that the IRS has 2,284 fewer skilled auditors to handle the sophisticated returns of wealthy taxpayers than it did in 1954. Seventy years ago, we had fewer auditors.

I believe the vast majority of Americans does their level best to file an honest tax return and pay their fair share of taxes. It boils my blood and theirs, too, to think that the tax cheaters are getting off the hook because the cops are not on the beat.

Historically, Republicans have taken away those auditors; have taken away the checks of the big, wealthy individuals and corporations. And they, of course, are tempted to cheat. Why let that happen when the vast majority of American families is doing the right thing? House Republicans just voted for a bill that will add \$100 billion to the deficit to take away these auditors. That is not the way to balance a budget, and it is not fair to American taxpayers.

If that is not enough, as part of the deal, Speaker MCCARTHY also promised MAGA hard-liners that the House would vote on that jumbo-sized national sales tax, which I spoke about. As Grover Norquist, who is quite a conservative and quite a man on the issue of taxes, said: It is a political gift to Biden and the Democrats to consider a national sales tax. Well, we say: If this is a gift, no thanks.

In the last 2 years, America's economy broke records and created 11 million jobs—the strongest job creation in the history of this Nation. The Nation's unemployment rate is near a 50-year low. Gas prices are finally coming down. Inflation is just starting to ease, and the deficit is going down. We need to keep the country and economy moving in the right direction, not devastate Social Security and Medicare and certainly not impose a national 30-percent sales tax.

Speaker MCCARTHY is meeting with President Biden tomorrow for the first time since he became Speaker. He needs to show up not just with platitudes but with a plan, in writing, as to what the Republicans want to put on the table.

What is the Republican plan? Are they going to cut Social Security and Medicare? Mr. MCCARTHY said “no, no way,” on a Sunday talk show this weekend, but the math doesn't add up for his fiscal goals unless he goes after the entitlement programs.

If you are going to do that, Speaker MCCARTHY, be honest with the American people. Are the Republicans planning to slash money for education? healthcare? veterans? transportation? clean water? In the first two decades of this century, thanks in large part to the National Institutes of Health, cancer deaths went down by almost one-third in the United States—saving an estimated 3.5 million lives. Are we going to cut medical research, Mr. Speaker?

Speaker MCCARTHY and MAGA Republicans need to level with the American people.

Speaker MCCARTHY, my ask is very simple: Put your plan on the table.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

## NATO

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, today I rise to highlight the need to strengthen our alliances as bad actors around the world continue to threaten peace and global stability.

In August, my Senate colleagues and I took a critical step to bolster our defense by ratifying Finland and Sweden as NATO members. This was the right action to take. It is time for all remaining NATO member countries to follow this example and approve expanding our Transatlantic Alliance by adding two very valuable and reliable partners.

In just a few short weeks, we will be marking a grim milestone of the 1-year anniversary of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine. Russia's brutal actions in Ukraine, coupled with its increasingly escalatory rhetoric and continued aggression, have shown us and our allies that we must strengthen our collective ability to maintain global stability. Given their proximity to Russia, Finland and Sweden are investing in their capabilities to prevent a similar attack.

The Finns have demonstrated their willingness to enhance NATO's military strength by significantly increasing military spending above NATO's requirements, participating in joint military training exercises, and strengthening its air power with upgrades to an F-35 fleet under the Foreign Military Sales program.

Finland has been one of NATO's most active partners and a strong contributor to NATO-led operations and missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The Finns have also delivered crucial support to Ukraine by providing hundreds of millions of dollars in military aid in addition to providing critical humanitarian assistance.

Finland's large, well-trained ground force and increasingly capable air force are interoperable with NATO. The Finns also have extensive experience in monitoring Russian activities along their 833-mile shared border, and its addition would make defending the Baltic States so much easier.

Earlier this month, I visited Finland and met with defense leaders who reaffirmed their commitment to bilateral cooperation and the value they would bring to NATO. As a member of NATO, I have no doubt Finland would be a net contributor of security, not a taker.

I strongly urge remaining members to join the U.S. and approve Finland's and Sweden's accessions to NATO to confront evolving security challenges and the ongoing threat posed by Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

## TRIBUTE TO THE SAINT JAMES ACADEMY TROJANS AND JIMMY PERRY

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, today, I want to begin by recognizing a

former colleague of mine and some of Alabama's student athletes.

The Saint James Academy Trojans in Montgomery, AL, recently won the Class 3A Football State Championship for the first time in the school's history. The team, no doubt, put in many long hours on and off the field to prepare for this great, historic achievement. Winning is always fun, but the lessons learned about dedication, discipline, and perseverance will stay with these young men and coaches forever.

I also want to extend a special congrats to the Trojans' coach, Jimmy Perry, on the State championship and on his recent retirement announcement. What a way to go out.

I first met Coach Perry when I hired him in 1999 to be the director of football operations at Auburn University. It was clear then that he had a very bright future ahead of him in the world of coaching, and it is fitting that his coaching career has ended with this historic victory.

So congratulations to Coach Perry and his team at Saint James Academy. I wish them all the best and the coach all the best in future endeavors.

## BIG GOVERNMENT

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, last week, I spent time on the floor urging my colleagues to prioritize freedom in the 118th Congress. By learning from the mistakes of overregulation in the past, we can focus on creating a brighter future and a more prosperous future for all Americans.

We should be doing everything we can to fix the problems created by the government and get Americans back on their feet by unleashing our economic potential and opening doors of opportunity. Unfortunately, too many here in Washington are still focused on growing the size of government and adding regulations they say will save the environment. However, very rarely does making the government larger benefit the American taxpayers and the American citizens of this country.

For decades, fans of Big Government have used climate change warnings to grow their power—for decades, for as long as I can remember. They have claimed we are near the edge of a climate cliff—a prediction they know is impossible to prove and has never come true. Of course, they claim the only solution to this cooked-up crisis is for you, the American taxpayer, to sacrifice even more of your freedoms to tackle this so-called climate dilemma. This sacrifice won't come from the elites, who flew their private jets to Switzerland just a few weeks ago—the ones who are crowing about this. They flew, just a couple of weeks ago, to lecture, while they were there, the working families of this country. No. These sacrifices are expected to be made by average, hard-working American taxpayers. That is what they want.

They want you to give up your affordable gas for imported fuel that is