

It is right, appropriate, and entirely normal that our need to raise the debt limit would be paired with negotiations regarding Democrats' runaway printing and spending.

The American people changed control of the House because the voters wanted to constrain Democrats' runaway, reckless, party-line spending. The voters of this country looked at the trillions of dollars of party-line spending, the runaway inflation, and the mountain of debt, and last November they hit the brakes.

We just experienced 2 years when Washington Democrats got to set policy without negotiating, and the American people put an end to it.

Some Democrats are trying to rewrite history and pretend that Republican demands for negotiations are unusual, but that, of course, is just false.

Back in 2017, the Senate Democratic leader said the debt ceiling gave Democrats "leverage" in broader talks. As the New York Times explained back in 2017, then-Speaker PELOSI and the Democratic leader "began formulating a plan to apply pressure, jettisoning the idea of backing a straightforward or 'clean' debt limit measure . . . as a way to gain muscle in coming negotiations." That was the Pelosi-Schumer playbook for the debt limit: Demand negotiations.

Here is how the Democratic leader put it himself at the time. He said the debt ceiling "gives another ample opportunity for bipartisanship, not for one party jamming its choices down the throats of the other."

So I trust Democrats will be consistent with their past positions and the White House will waste no time beginning the customary bipartisan negotiations with the new Republican majority over in the House. The President of the United States does not get to walk away from the table.

The same President who happily signed off on trillions of dollars of needless party-line spending needs to begin good-faith negotiations on spending reform with Speaker MCCARTHY and do it today.

#### STUDENT LOANS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now on a related matter, there are lots of egregious ways that President Biden has wasted taxpayer money trying to buy up his low approval ratings, but the Democrats' proposal for student loan socialism is really one of the worst.

It is like the Democrats paid scientists in a lab to invent the most unfair government handout that could possibly, possibly exist. Democrats want to take the graduate school loans of doctors and lawyers and white-collar professionals making six figures and put their debt on the shoulders of Americans who didn't take out loans at all.

To the middle-class families who saved, sacrificed, and skipped vaca-

tions to pay for more of their kids' college, the Democrats want to turn you into suckers.

To the plumbers, firefighters, check-out clerks, and auto mechanics who made career choices to avoid taking on debt, the Democrats think dentists and the lawyers deserve extra handouts at your expense.

To the patriots who volunteered to serve our Nation in uniform as part of a plan to attend college debt-free, the Democrats want to change the rules behind your back.

President Biden and his party wake up every day looking for ways to transfer money and power away from the working class toward elites. But even for today's Democratic Party, this one is especially galling.

This is "reverse Robin Hood" policy: Democrats stealing from the working class to reward people who are comparatively better off. It just isn't fair on a personal level. It is also staggeringly reckless fiscal policy.

Remember, this whole undertaking was first set up as a short-term emergency measure at the very start of COVID—those earliest weeks when the entire economy seemed to be in a free fall. That was almost 3 years ago.

Shortly afterward, thanks to the bipartisan CARES Act that came out of the Republican-led Senate, the economy rebounded. Household savings actually went up. Many white-collar professionals spent months, if not years, working remotely from the comfort of their living rooms. Any legitimate reason for pausing loan payments evaporated just a few months after it began, but the Democrats have kept it going, year after year. Now they want to magically wave away people's debts altogether. Needless to say, this would be enormously expensive for the country.

If you add up the cost of three things: the nearly 3-year-long "pause" thus far, the mass jubilee the Biden administration is trying to defend in court, and the Democrats' proposal to turn the income-driven payment program into permanent socialism, the total cost of these three measures is projected to hit \$1 trillion—\$1 trillion.

This estimate is from our colleague Senator CASSIDY, who is shining a bright spotlight on these terrible policies as the incoming ranking member of the HELP Committee.

On top of all the reckless inflationary spending the Democrats have pushed through, they want to redistribute up to another trillion dollars away from working-class Americans toward college-educated people who already earn higher salaries on average.

The Democrats want to squeeze even more money out of cashiers, welders, first responders, janitors, and cosmetologists and send it to a group of people who already outearn those people on an average basis—more reckless spending, more debt inflation, and no fairness for American families.

#### BURMA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, finally, today marks a solemn anniversary for the people of Burma and for all of us around the world who spent years—literally years—rooting for them to make progress toward greater freedom and democracy. Two years ago, their hopes of a stable democracy were wrenched away by a brutal military coup.

To date, this takeover by the Tatmadaw, which is their army, has displaced 1.2 million people, including many thousands who have been forced to flee the country altogether.

Inside Burma, more than 16,000 people have been taken as political prisoners. At one point, the military was detaining American journalist Danny Fenster and Nathan Maung; the Australian economist, Sean Turnell; dozens of innocent children; and, of course, my friend Aung San Suu Kyi, whose latest conviction and a sham trial leaves her facing the possibility of life in prison.

Expert observers count the coup's death toll at 19,000. That includes people this illegitimate government simply executed outright, like the activists Ko Jimmy and Phyo Zeya Thaw.

Now the leaders of the Tatmadaw coup are laying out plans in broad daylight to stamp out Burma's pro-democracy movement once and for all. The military is shedding any last ounce of legitimacy it pretended to have and is now conducting airstrikes against innocent civilians.

The junta's new regulations for this year's election are designed to make viable opposition virtually impossible. No wonder the illegitimate Tatmadaw rulers rolled out the red carpet for Putin's Foreign Minister to visit Burma. Thugs recognize other thugs.

On the second anniversary of the coup, with a potentially devastating sham election on the horizon, it is absolutely vital that the United States continue our assistance to the National Unity Government and other key groups working inside Burma to protect the innocent and advance the cause of democracy and increase cross-border humanitarian aid. By our example, America should rally our partners to raise the international stakes for the Tatmadaw's continued brutality.

In December, the National Defense Authorization Act instructed the Biden administration to take several more concrete steps to bulk up American support for the people of Burma. It made sanctions on senior junta officials mandatory. It required more targeted and precisely timed sanctions against state-owned enterprises like MOGE, M-O-G-E. Finally, the NDAA also notably authorized funding for programs to strengthen federalism in and among ethnic states in Burma and for technical support and nonlethal assistance to Burma's ethnic armed organizations and People's Defence Forces to strengthen communication, command and control, and coordination of

international relief and other operations between and among those entities.

So, Mr. President, the people of Burma are fighting for the sort of future that citizens of democracies like ours enjoy: the right to self-determination. I am proud to stand behind them in this effort.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative 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.

(The remarks of Mr. THUNE pertaining to the introduction of S. 204 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. THUNE. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). The Senator from Louisiana.

#### EDUCATION

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, Louisiana, like all of our States, is working as hard as we can to improve K-12, elementary and secondary education. We used to have the best system of elementary and secondary education in the world. We still have the best system of higher education in the world, bar none. Kids from all over our planet want to come to America to go to college.

I know our universities have problems. We have to do a better job, in my judgment, with encouraging our universities to allow the free exchange of ideas, the dialectic through which we get the truth. I will save that topic for another day.

Our problem in America is elementary and secondary education. It is frustrating. We made some improvements, but not nearly enough. It is frustrating. Americans can do extraordinary things. Americans can unravel the human genome. Americans can take a diseased human heart and replace it with a new one and make the thing beat. Americans can send a person to the Moon and bring that person back safely. But we can't seem to teach all of our kids how to read and write and do basic math when we have 18 years to do it. I know the Presiding Officer knows what I am talking about because you, in a prior lifetime, have been in the trenches. Yes, we made progress, but it is so, so frustrating sometimes.

We have made progress. I know in Colorado, in part under your leadership—in large part under your leadership—Colorado has made strides. We made strides in Louisiana. We started—we have made efforts to improve for many, many years, but we started in earnest under a Governor in Lou-

isiana called Governor Buddy Roemer, back in the late eighties, early nineties. I am not saying other Governors before and after Buddy didn't contribute mightily, but Buddy made education a major goal of his administration. And we have made progress, but it is fits and it is starts.

Here is our problem today. Some years ago, we started grading our schools. We graded our schools in Louisiana, our elementary and secondary school for two reasons. First, because we want education quality and, No. 2, transparency. We want parents to know where their child is going to school. We grade our schools A, B, C, D, E, F, and it is tough because everybody wants to be the best, but that which is measured gets done.

Today, we still grade our schools and we should continue to grade our schools. But here is the problem: Forty-one percent of our elementary and middle schools get As and Bs. I think that is probably pretty accurate. We are going to get that number up, those letter grades up, but about 41 percent of our elementary and middle schools grade "A" or "B." Seventy percent of our high schools grade "A" or "B." Something is not mentioned here. I wish I could say that 70 percent of our high schools were "A" or "B" schools, but we all know in Louisiana that they are not. If you look at our college entry scores, if you look at our ACT scores, if you look at other objective assessments, they are not in line with 70 percent of our high schools being "A" schools or "B" schools, while only 40 percent of our elementary and middle schools are. And that is just a fact. I hope there will come a time in my lifetime when I come here and say we have 90 percent or all of our schools are "A" or "B" schools, but I can't do that today. I wish I could, but I can't.

We need to look reality in the eye and accept it—not like we do in Washington, look reality in the eye and deny it. In Louisiana, we believe in looking reality in the eye and accept it. I know it is hard.

Right now, our teachers and our principals and our superintendents and our legislatures and people of Louisiana who care about education are trying to reform the system and come up with a new methodology, an objective methodology that properly grades our high schools; and it is hard. I know. I get it.

Here is the undercurrent. A lot of our teachers and our principals and our school board members are concerned that if the grades go down to reflect reality, they are going to get blamed. They are going to get blamed, and I get it. And it is wrong to blame them.

I will just mention our teachers. You know, for a kid to learn, somebody has to make him do his homework. Teachers can't do that. For a kid to learn, someone has to make that child go to bed at night and get a full night's sleep. For a kid to learn, someone has to feed that kid breakfast in the morning. For a kid to learn, someone at

home has to enforce and reinforce to that child that he or she has to mind his teachers. It is called "parents."

In Louisiana, as in other States and as throughout the world, unfortunately, we have some parents who don't seem to care. I don't know what to do about that. I don't know why it is, but we do. And we can't expect teachers and superintendents and school board members to take the place of parents, but too often, they are blamed for all of the problems when, really, it starts with the parents. And the fact of the matter is, if a parent—if a parent doesn't love his kid—I can't imagine that, but it happens—if a parent doesn't love his kid, the kid is not going to stop loving his parent; the kid is going to stop loving himself. So I get it. We can't hold our teachers and our superintendents and our school board members responsible for fixing the impossible. We just have to figure out a way to work around it.

It is not just money. The Federal Government, State government, local government last year spent somewhere in the range of \$760 billion—three-quarters of a trillion dollars—on elementary and secondary education. In Louisiana, we spent about \$12,000 per year, per child. That is a lot of money in my State, given the standard in cost of living. By way of comparison, Florida spends about \$10,000. It is not just money. I read a statistic one time—it is several years old. I don't know if it is accurate today or not. But I read several years ago that we spend twice as much—we, in America—spend about twice as much on elementary and secondary education as Slovakia does, yet we rank about the same. I don't know if it is still accurate, but it was then. It is not just money. It is also will. It is commitment.

I want to emphasize one more time that we need to come up with a new system that doesn't just blame the teachers and the superintendents and the school board members. I don't blame them for not wanting to be the scapegoats. About—I don't know—it was 2002, 2003, I was State treasurer. One day, I was listening in on a legislative hearing, listening to all these experts testify about how we fix these schools. There was not a teacher among them. I remember thinking, you know, I wonder how many of these folks really know what public schools are like today. So I went back to my office, and I made a phone call to these Baton Rouge Parish School systems where our State capital is located, and I said: What does it take to be a substitute teacher? They said, man, we need substitutes. All you have to do is have a college degree and go to a short orientation. We need substitutes so bad, we will take politicians. I said: Sign me up.

Every year since then, I try to do it three times a year. Sometimes I try to do it more. I have done it less this year. I will make it up this spring. I have been a volunteer substitute teacher. Every time, I insisted I really want