

color and the police in those cities. It was pretty eye-opening. While many young people and many not so young people are raised to believe that the police are their friends and people you could depend on and call if you are in trouble, in some communities, there is a lack of trust and confidence in the police because of a very different experience that they have had in those communities.

I believe there still is a broad bipartisan appetite for these types of reforms that were included in the JUSTICE Act. I was optimistic that we could, at the time, pass a police reform bill that was desperately needed, but when Leader MCCONNELL tried to bring that bill to the floor, our Democratic colleagues blocked it. That is right. They blocked it. They refused to allow the Senate to even debate or consider this legislation.

Strangely enough, this package included a bill by Senator BOOKER and then-Senator KAMALA HARRIS to make lynching a Federal crime, but they voted to block the consideration of the bill that included their bill to make lynching a Federal crime. It just didn't make any sense to me then, and it doesn't make any sense to me now.

This would have strengthened the use and accountability for body cameras—I am talking about the bigger bill now, of course—improved access to deescalation training and duty-to-intervene training, and established two commissions to give us a better understanding and recommendations on the challenges that needed to be addressed in the long run. But, as I said, our colleagues across the aisle blocked it. This important point is worth remembering now as our Democratic colleagues renew their call for police reform.

Now, in light of the filibuster of the JUSTICE Act, I introduced a standalone bill that included deescalation provisions from Senator SCOTT's legislation, and I worked with my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE on a bipartisan bill that was signed into law last December. So at least that piece of the JUSTICE Act did become law. It was signed into law by President Biden.

Deescalation training is very important. That doesn't mean that rogue police officers will always follow their training. Indeed, these officers, if they were trained to deescalate these conflicts, certainly did not follow their training, and they will be held accountable, as they should be, by the prosecutors who will bring charges against them. But it bears repeating that Republicans tried to bring a police reform bill to the floor 2½ years ago, and our Democratic colleagues stood in the way.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on another matter, today, President Biden and Speaker MCCARTHY will sit down to discuss options to avoid a debt crisis and rein in government spending.

The one thing that President Biden and Speaker MCCARTHY agree on is that we cannot breach the debt ceiling. I guess that is at least a start. From there, there doesn't seem to be a lot of common ground, not yet anyway. With a potential default on the horizon, this topic has gotten a lot of attention, but as we all know, America's debt crisis didn't appear overnight. It has been building for decades.

As I have said before and will say again, Republicans and Democrats have not exactly covered themselves with glory when it comes to deficit spending and increasing the debt. Washington has spent and spent with no meaningful steps to balance the budget. We are writing checks—spending money—that we know people of my generation will never have to pay back but that younger generations certainly will. That strikes me as profoundly immoral. The national debt has skyrocketed from \$3.2 trillion in 1980—\$3.2 trillion in 1980—to \$9.7 trillion in 2000 to \$31.5 trillion today.

I think it was Everett Dirksen who said, years ago, “A billion here, a billion there, and pretty soon you're talking about real money.” Nobody ever thought to use the T-word until recently.

During COVID-19, we worked together to avert a public health crisis and an economic catastrophe during the pandemic, and we did that on a bipartisan basis, but in the last 2 years, our Democratic colleagues have spent another \$2.5 trillion-plus in purely partisan spending bills: the so-called American Recovery Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

There has been more than \$2.5 trillion in partisan spending, and the President takes the position that he won't even negotiate on the debt ceiling, when he is the one person whose signature is required to sign something into law. And by his signature, he has raised the debt more than \$2.5 trillion in partisan spending in the last 2 years, and he won't even negotiate? It strikes me as unsustainable and certainly irresponsible.

The President was happy to take a tour across America to brag about these costly bills, but when we hit the debt limit, he is nowhere to be seen. He is pointing the finger of blame at the Republican House of Representatives and at the Speaker and suggesting that, well, if you want to cut spending, tell us where you would cut.

Let's look at spending that the President and Democrats were solely responsible for. If we could cut back \$2½ trillion of spending, that would do a lot to address the current level of debt. But the President's position is, it is not my responsibility. I don't really care. And he wants to try to lay all of this at the feet of Speaker MCCARTHY. It is wildly inappropriate and irresponsible.

In short, President Biden has made clear that he expects Congress to raise the debt limit with no conditions at-

tached, but that also means to let this runaway spending and accumulating debt continue. That is the part he doesn't say but is implicit in his position.

Republicans have made clear that his position is untenable. For one, it is a matter of financial prudence. Congress can't raise the debt ceiling just to keep spending like there is no tomorrow. We need to get government spending in check, and the best way to do that is on a bipartisan basis. But there is also a matter of practicality.

Republicans now control the House, meaning that the only viable path to success means compromise. We have a divided government—that is what the midterm elections gave us. Some of my colleagues like to say that divided government is the best time to do hard things. I think that is true, but if it doesn't change behavior, those hard things never get addressed.

President Biden can roll out as many ultimatums as he wants, but the reality is his party no longer controls all the levers of government like it has during the last 2 years. And in order to avoid a debt crisis, which he said is nonnegotiable, he is going to have to work with Republicans.

Today's meeting with Speaker MCCARTHY is a start, but at minimum, I hope the President will walk back his statement about not negotiating and understand that he has no choice but to work with Republicans, just like Speaker MCCARTHY has no choice but to work with President Biden. That is the nature of a divided government that the voters gave us with the midterm elections, and we need to get serious about workable solutions.

Secretary Yellen has said she thinks that the government will not default before June, which means we have approximately 4 months to work this out. I hope today's meeting between the President and the Speaker marks the beginning of bipartisan negotiations, and I am eager to learn more about their discussion.

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF SPACE SHUTTLE “COLUMBIA” ACCIDENT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on a final matter, today marks a solemn anniversary for our country. Twenty years ago today, the Space Shuttle *Columbia* was making its return to Earth on the heels of a mission dubbed STS-107.

After 16 days in orbit, the shuttle was bound for Kennedy Space Center in Florida, where members of the astronauts' families and countless spectators gathered to watch its landing, which is always an exciting and inspiring sight.

The shuttle was traveling across the southern part of the United States, and as it crossed Texas on a beautiful Saturday morning, something terrible happened. Folks along the flight path stood in their yards, excited to watch a glimpse of *Columbia* returning from its 28th mission. They watched the orbiter streak across the sky at some 12,000

miles an hour, when, suddenly, they heard a loud noise and saw the shuttle begin to come apart.

We soon realized that the worst had happened: The shuttle broke into several pieces as it reentered Earth's atmosphere, and all seven astronauts aboard lost their lives.

The crew of *Columbia* included two Texans: Rick Husband and Willie McCool, along with Michael Anderson, Kalpana Chawla, David Brown, Laurel Clark, and Ilan Ramon. They were scheduled to land at Kennedy Space Center just 15 minutes after passing over Texas.

The disaster left a field of wreckage that stretched from Fort Worth, across East Texas, and into Louisiana. Texas is a big place, but that means virtually the whole breadth of our State was covered with wreckage.

The government, of course, immediately launched a massive search to recover pieces of the space shuttle in order to determine what went wrong. NASA officials, National Guard troops, and law enforcement at all levels began scouring the landscape to recover pieces of the shuttle. Divers from the Environmental Protection Agency led efforts to recover pieces that fell into the Toledo Bend Reservoir near Hemp-hill.

Some 25,000 volunteers from Texas and Louisiana helped search an area that covered 2.3 million acres. They ranged from college students at nearby Stephen F. Austin to teams of ham radio operators who helped law enforcement with communications. As Texans and Americans do, people from all walks of life came together at a time of tragedy and rallied behind a unified effort to help bring answers to a nation in mourning.

This tragedy happened just a couple of months into my first Senate term, and I witnessed this massive response effort in action.

In the aftermath, I visited an area in Nacogdoches, which is over in East Texas, where tents were set up by search teams. It was remarkable to see the dedication of men and women firsthand engaged in this effort.

Search crews battled the rain and cold temperatures as they combed through pine forests and underbrush searching for wreckage. Recovery teams and volunteers found everything from a 600-pound piece of a main engine to the sole of a spacesuit boot. These discoveries, of course, were crucial to the investigation, which helped NASA understand what went wrong and how we could prevent similar accidents from occurring in the future.

In the months and years since, the Agency underwent an extensive transformation of its culture and operations to improve the safety of future missions. Jon Clark, a former NASA flight surgeon, whose wife Laurel was killed on *Columbia* said:

Their sacrifice has evolved into a safer space program.

Those changes are no consolation for the families who lost loved ones 20

years ago today, but I hope they can find some comfort in the knowledge that these American heroes made a lasting impact on America's space program.

I appreciate the Texans who came together in the wake of this tragedy to preserve pieces of *Columbia* and provide NASA and these families with answers that they so earnestly sought. Their efforts, then and now, have helped make the Nation's space program safer and more successful.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the loss of *Columbia*, I am proud to co-sponsor a Senate resolution to commemorate the loss of *Columbia* and honor its crew. I appreciate the bipartisan support of Senators on both sides of the aisle who have joined in this effort, and I hope the resolution will pass unanimously today.

Today, we pay tribute to seven courageous individuals who lost their lives aboard the Space Shuttle *Columbia*. We remember, we honor, and we celebrate their commitment to research, exploration, and the pursuit of the extraordinary. We honor their legacy by continuing to push the boundaries of scientific discovery and human space.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:30 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. ROSEN).

SUPPORTING THE OBSERVATION OF NATIONAL TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY PREVENTION MONTH—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

INFLATION

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I rise today to discuss yet another of the consequences of President Biden's policies, and that is that prices are going up, the price hikes.

Families in West Virginia and across our Nation are struggling because the policies and priorities of these past 2 years have made essential items and goods seemingly unattainable. Whether it is gas, goods or services, energy prices, utility costs, small business expenses, owning a home, or simply affording to put food on the table, American families are squeezed at every turn.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, prices have risen 13.7 percent since President Biden took office. A recent report from the Heritage Foundation found that because of that staggering rise, the average American family has \$7,400 less in their pocket at the end of the year.

This is a timely topic today because the Federal Reserve has just an-

nounced the eighth consecutive interest rate hike they have had to deploy in order to curb this administration's 2-year spending spree which is fueling our high-inflation economy. But an interest rate hike—once reserved as a measure that sends a direct signal to policymakers—is just another Wednesday in this President's America.

Chairman Powell warned last August that the continued interest rate increases and inflationary pressures would bring "pain to households and businesses." And, boy, does that ring true today. Meanwhile, President Biden continues to laud small inflation changes and slowed economic growth, but he refuses to recognize his administration's role in the record-high prices that the American middle class is continuing to have to face or the further economic fallout Americans are likely to face—projected by many economists—later this year from interest rate hikes in the past year.

So let's just dive into this a little bit. Whether it is a conversation with Senate colleagues, waiting in line at a store, or a constituent calling my office, the cost of food remains a central topic of concern all across this Nation. According to the most recent reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of groceries went up 11.8 percent from the year prior. You hear about it with meat, eggs, bread, and butter—all the essentials. To add to this, the cost of restaurant purchases is up 8.4 percent. In fact, the price of every food category has continued to grow at a faster rate than its historical average.

A recent PBS analysis also points out that America's rural population is experiencing their cost of living going up faster and lingering longer than those in urban areas, and that is a factor that disproportionately impacts people in my State of West Virginia. In the words of one West Virginian who wrote in to my office, "How are we supposed to keep our houses warm and food on the table?"

Speaking of housing, it remains unaffordable. Because of President Biden's price hikes, fixed mortgage rates rose from 3.4 percent in January of 2022 to over double, 7.12 percent, in a matter of months. The National Association of Realtors' Housing Affordability Index dipped below 100, signifying that average American families do not have enough money to qualify for a mortgage on a median-priced home. In other words, new families and hard-working individuals who made smart financial decisions with the hope of purchasing a home can no longer pursue that dream because it is out of reach; it is unaffordable.

Moving to energy—something that is absolutely central to the proud history and tradition of our State, my State—despite the recent downturn in energy prices, it can't be forgotten that Americans are still paying 30 percent more for energy, and at its peak in June of 2022, it was 70 percent more. With costs