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Senate

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, Your promises are sure. Bless our lawmakers in all their undertakings. In their friendships, keep them faithful and true. In their emotions, keep them calm and serene, free from anxiety and care. In their material things, give them contentment and generosity. In their spiritual lives, deliver them from doubt and distrust. In their work, give them guidance, courage, and success. And when misfortune comes, use the trials to bring them closer to each other and to You. Let nothing make their certainty that You alone are sovereign over their lives be shaken.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL UNDER CHAPTER 8 OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, OF THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RELATING TO "WAIVERS AND MODIFICATIONS OF FEDERAL STUDENT LOANS"—Resumed

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.J. Res. 45, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (H.J. Res. 45) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Department of Education relating to "Waivers and Modifications of Federal Student Loans".

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, last night, a large majority of both Democrats and Republicans in the House passed bipartisan legislation to protect the U.S. economy, protect American families, and eliminate the threat of a first-ever default.

The bill is now in the Senate where we begin the process today of passing this legislation as soon as possible. The Senate will stay in session until we send a bill avoiding default to President Biden's desk. We will keep working until the job is done.

Time is a luxury the Senate does not have if we want to prevent default. June 5 is less than 4 days away. At this point, any needless delay or last-minute holdups would be an unnecessary and even dangerous risk, and any change to this bill that forces us to send it back to the House would be entirely unacceptable. It would almost guarantee default.

So, again, the Senate will stay in session until we send a bill avoiding default to the President's desk, and we will keep working until the job is done.

The vast majority of Senators recognize that passing this bill is supremely important. It is about preserving the full faith and credit of the United States. There is no good reason—none—to bring this process down to the wire, no good reason to bring this process down to the wire, and that, too, is dangerous and risky.

So, today, I hope we see a genuine desire to keep this process moving quickly. I hope we see nothing even approaching brinksmanship. The country cannot afford that right now. Instead, I hope we see bipartisan cooperation.

Bipartisanship is always the best way to avoid default and get this bill over the finish line. We have said it over and over again. Bipartisanship is what prevented default under President Trump; it is what prevented default under President Biden; and it is what will prevent default in this case too. Partisanship and hostage-taking, meanwhile, were never going to win the day.

Let me say this. Last night's House vote was a resounding affirmation of bipartisanship, which I hope bodes well for quick movement here in the Senate. Large majorities from both sides came together to produce last night's 314–314—"yes" votes. Two-thirds of Republicans voted for it, and more than two-thirds of Democrats voted for it. I thank my House colleagues on both sides of the aisle who fulfilled their duty to prevent a catastrophic default.

We need that same spirit of bipartisanship that governed the House vote to continue here in the Senate this morning. I hope that very soon we can finish the job of putting the default in our rearview mirror. This is the best thing we can do right now for our economy and for American families.

I am optimistic the Senate is going to get this done, but it will take one

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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more concerted, focused, and bipartisan push to get us over the finish line.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, last night, an overwhelming majority of our House colleagues voted to pass the agreement Speaker MCCARTHY reached with President Biden. In doing so, they took an urgent and important step in the right direction for the health of our economy and the future of our country.

The Fiscal Responsibility Act avoids the catastrophic consequences of a default on our Nation's debt, and just as importantly, it makes the most serious headway in years toward curbing Washington Democrats' reckless spending addiction. The bill that the House just passed has the potential to cut Federal spending by \$1.5 trillion. Now the Senate has the chance to make that important progress a reality.

Madam President, remember where we were just a few months ago. After 2 years of reckless spending and painful, runaway inflation, the American people elected a Republican House majority to serve as a check on Washington Democrats' power. It was clear from the outset that preserving the full faith and credit of the United States was going to come down to an agreement that could pass both the people's House and earn the President's signature—in other words, direct negotiations between Speaker MCCARTHY and President Biden just like I have said for months—for months.

So, back in February, Speaker MCCARTHY got right to work. He made it clear to the President he was ready to take serious steps, not only to avoid crisis in the near term but to put government spending on a more sustainable path for the long term.

Unfortunately, it took President Biden months to accept this basic reality, but when the President finally came to the table, House Republicans worked hard to secure as many serious spending reforms as possible, considering that we were in a divided government, and they produced a deal that moves every key Republican priority in the right direction.

The Speaker's agreement cuts domestic discretionary spending while increasing support for veterans and the Armed Forces. It locks in promising reforms to infrastructure permitting. It claws back unspent COVID emergency funds. It slashes bloated spending at the IRS. It ties future executive branch regulations to new spending cuts.

The deal the House passed last night is a promising step toward fiscal sanity. Ah, but make no mistake, there is much more work to be done. The fight to reel in wasteful spending is far from over.

Our obligation to provide for the common defense is especially urgent. For years, Republicans have led significant investments in improving the readiness of our Armed Forces and modernizing their capabilities to face down emerging threats, but since President Biden took office, Republicans have had to fight year after year to ensure we meet the needs of our military.

Fortunately, we have secured bipartisan recognition that President Biden's budget requests have underfunded our national defense. This was especially true last year when Republicans secured a substantial, real-dollar increase to defense funding and ended Democrats' artificial demands for parity with nondefense discretionary spending. This bought our military valuable time, but it was hardly a silver bullet.

As I said yesterday, President Biden's refusal to let the defense portion of this agreement exceed his insufficient budget request is certainly disappointing.

So while the coming votes are an important step in the right direction, we cannot—cannot—neglect our fundamental obligation to address the Nation's most pressing national security challenges. Vladimir Putin's brutal invasion of Ukraine continues. Iran's state sponsorship of terrorism against Americans and our partners continues. North Korea's destabilizing nuclear proliferation continues. China's growing challenge to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific continues as well.

So the Senate cannot afford to neglect its obligation to America's men and women in uniform. Our urgent work to help them defend our Nation, support our allies, and safeguard our interests remains unfinished, and so does our work to bring more of Washington Democrats' reckless liberal spending to heel.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

TRIBUTE TO JERRY OSTER

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, before I begin, I would like to take just a moment this morning to recognize a pillar of the South Dakota press corps who has served at WNAX in Yankton, SD, for an incredible 47 years. His name is Jerry Oster, and he truly is an institution on the media landscape in South Dakota.

Jerry joined WNAX as news director in September of 1976, and he has be-

come one of the most familiar and beloved voices on the airwaves in South Dakota.

I have had many great conversations with Jerry over the years on air and off, and I can say for certain that his departure will leave a very big hole in the South Dakota radio scene. But he has more than earned his retirement, and I know that he will relish getting to spend more time with his wife Cheryl—herself just recently retired from an amazing 43 years with Farm Credit Services of America—and with his sons and their wives and his six grandchildren.

Jerry, congratulations on an incredible and award-winning career, and enjoy some well-deserved rest.

H.J. RES. 45

Mr. President, last August, mere days after he had signed a bill that would supposedly reduce the deficit by \$238 billion, President Biden announced a student loan giveaway that is said to cost taxpayers nearly a trillion dollars over the next decade. In a Presidency distinguished by bad economic decisions, this was a particularly notable one.

There are two main parts to the President's scheme. There is the outright forgiveness of \$10,000 in Federal student debt—or \$20,000 for Pell grant recipients—which is set to cost American taxpayers somewhere in the neighborhood of half a trillion dollars. Then there is the President's radical revamp of the income-driven repayment system, which will bring total cost for the President's plan somewhere close to a trillion dollars.

There are a number of obvious problems with the President's plan for forgiving student debt. I say "forgiving student debt," but it is more like transferring the cost of student debt for the relatively small percentage of taxpayers in this country with student debt to American taxpayers as a whole. It is something of a slap in the face to Americans who chose more affordable college options or worked their way through school to avoid taking on student loans or whose parents scrimped and saved to put them through college.

It is also a slap in the face to members of the military who signed up to serve this country and earned GI bill benefits to help with tuition or training. Not to mention that negating this popular benefit could drag down recruitment and retention.

And, of course, it is deeply unfair to ask the many Americans who worked hard to pay off their loans or who never pursued college in the first place to take on the burden of student debt for individuals who took out loans for college or graduate school and agreed to pay them back.

And let's remember, we are asking taxpayers, at large, to foot the bill for student loan cancellation for Americans who enjoy greater long-term earning potential than many of the Americans who will be helping to shoulder the burden for their debts.

The President's student loan giveaway isn't a government handout for the needy; it is a government handout that will be disproportionately beneficial to Americans who are better off. It is ironic coming from someone who claims he wants to build the economy from the bottom up and the middle out. The President's student loan giveaway is decidedly more top-down, let's face it.

And speaking of the economy, Americans continue to struggle with the effects of the Democrat-driven inflation crisis that has beset our economy for most of the President's administration. Prices are up 16 percent on average since the President took office, and we are nowhere near getting back to the target inflation rate of 2 percent.

What is the President's student loan plan almost guaranteed to do? In the words of the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget where the President's own Treasury Secretary served on the board, the President's student loan giveaway will "meaningfully boost inflation"—"meaningfully boost inflation."

I have talked about the forgiveness part of the President's plan and how fundamentally unfair it is, but that is only half of the President's student loan giveaway. The other half is just as problematic because it sets up a system in which the majority of Federal borrowers will never fully repay their loans. The Urban Institute, a left-of-center think tank, estimates that just 22 percent of those with bachelor's degrees enrolled in the President's new income-driven repayment program would repay their loans in full—22 percent—and many individuals would never be required to repay a penny.

And who will be footing the bill for all those student loan dollars that aren't repaid? Well, you guessed it—the American taxpayers.

Needless to say, the President's income-driven repayment plan will not only fail to curtail student borrowing, it will actually encourage it. If you can reasonably expect that you won't have to fully pay back your loans, you are much more likely to feel free to borrow and to borrow liberally.

And, of course, neither the President's outright student loan forgiveness nor his forgiveness masquerading as income-driven repayment will do anything to address the problem of soaring college costs. In fact, the President's student loan giveaway is likely to make the problem worse.

You only have to look at what happened when Democrats forced through their \$7,500 tax credit for Americans who purchased electric vehicles. Car manufacturers, not surprisingly, raised their prices by a similar amount. Similarly, if colleges can expect that the Federal Government will pick up a sizable part of the tab for their students' education, they are extremely unlikely to feel any pressing need to cut costs or to stop tuition hikes. If anything, colleges might further increase tuition and fees.

Currently, the outcome of the forgiveness portion of the President's student loan giveaway is unclear. The President's legal authority for this action is dubious, and his ability to unilaterally forgive student loans has been challenged in the Supreme Court, with a decision expected within weeks.

And, today, the Senate looks likely to pass a resolution that would block the forgiveness part of the President's proposal. Unfortunately, the President is guaranteed to veto the measure, and there are not enough Democrats in the House and Senate willing to override his veto. Apparently, the possibility of garnering votes from Americans with student debt is reason enough for Democrats to ignore the blatantly regressive nature of the President's student loan giveaway—and the fact that it will almost unquestionably worsen the problem of rising college costs, not to mention the fact that it will drive up inflation and balloon the deficit.

I haven't even mentioned the third part of the President's student loan legacy, which is the COVID-era student loan repayment pause that President Biden has extended six times during his Presidency with no reasonable justification. That pause, which has been in place for 3 years now, costs taxpayers \$5 billion per month. Fortunately, this pause is guaranteed to end thanks to the Fiscal Responsibility Act, the legislation Speaker MCCARTHY and President Biden agreed on to raise the debt ceiling. But while the end of the pause is a victory for taxpayers, the savings that will result pale in comparison to the tremendous costs of the President's student loan giveaway. And if the Supreme Court doesn't overturn the forgiveness portion of the President's student loan giveaway, American taxpayers will be stuck with the full nearly trillion-dollar bill. It will be one more negative economic legacy from Democrats and the Biden administration.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor to urge all of my colleagues to vote against this Republican bill that would undo President Biden's student debt relief plan and rip away relief borrowers across the country are counting on.

It is hard to overstate how badly the student debt crisis has strained our borrowers and our families nationwide, and this crisis has been a drag on our whole country and our economy. It is holding people back from starting families or starting a business or buying a home—or, in many cases, just making ends meet.

The student debt relief President Biden announced last fall is life-changing for so many borrowers. Under his plan, tens of millions of people who are struggling with student debt will finally see their balances go down, and millions will have their debt wiped out entirely.

Before Republican interests sued to deny borrowers this life-changing relief, putting the President's plan on pause, over 26 million people across all 50 States had already applied for or were automatically eligible for that relief.

And let's be clear. This relief is targeted to reach those who need it the most. Ninety percent of the relief will go to borrowers earning less than \$75,000 a year. That is such a big deal.

I have heard from so many people across my State who were so grateful and relieved to have a glimmer of hope finally, to see a light at the end of the tunnel, and now Republicans want to snuff it out. They are trying to deny relief to borrowers in court and now here in Congress too. That is what we are voting on today.

To the hard-working people in America who are counting on the student debt relief, listen up. Republicans are willing to do anything and everything to prevent you from living a life without crushing debt.

And let's be clear. This Republican bill wouldn't only rip away relief borrowers who qualify under the President's plan are counting on. This CRA that we are going to vote on could impact the pause on loan payments and cause major problems for borrowers who have received relief through the Public Service Loan Forgiveness and income-driven repayment programs.

That means these Republican efforts could create the perfect storm for more than 260,000 public service workers who have already earned that relief. Borrowers who thought they were done paying their loans may have to pay more interest or additional payments. Think about that.

You know who we are talking about: nurses and teachers and firefighters and medical researchers. Seriously, these are the people who keep America going. The cold, hard reality is that if Republicans get their way and pass this into law, people across the country would have relief that they have counted on snatched away from them, plans they have made upended, less money in their pockets, and monthly payments not just abruptly restarted but maybe even abruptly jacked up hundreds of dollars. That is what Republicans are voting for. It is chaos and hardship for borrowers and families across this country.

Mr. President, I can't speak for everyone, but I came here to make people's lives better. I didn't come here to punish them for this broken student loan system that they got stuck with. I cannot overstate how arcane and complicated and how broken our current student loan system is, and millions of Americans find themselves unfairly bogged down with massive debt, so often through no fault of their own.

Myself and all six brothers and sisters of mine got through college

thanks to Federal loans and aid programs. I know how much of a difference the President's plan for debt relief will make for people. I know President Biden did the right thing here for borrowers and for our economy. This is not a handout. It is a hand up that will benefit everyone.

So I urge my colleagues today to vote against this resolution that would needlessly hurt millions of hard-working Americans, and let's work together then to fix this broken student loan system in this country.

Mr. President, 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. 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.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I rise in opposition to the harmful CRA resolution that would cause tens of millions of hard-working Americans to see their monthly budgets get even further squeezed, making it harder to pay their bills or afford basic necessities.

I rise to defend one of the largest efforts to close the racial wealth gap in our Nation's history.

As we debate student debt relief, it would be remarkably tone deaf for this body to spend an entire debate on the life-changing student debt forgiveness plan without acknowledging who it is that is at the decision-making table and who is not.

Most people consider this body, the U.S. Senate, as being deliberative. Many Members take pride in this being the most deliberative body in the world. While we may be deliberative, we are clearly far from diverse—at least far from reflecting the diversity of our great Nation.

Most Members of this body are decades removed from when they earned their undergraduate degrees. And many are at least years, if not, years and years removed from even having to sit down to plan how they would pay for their kids' college education.

So before we even get into the merits of President Biden's plan to uplift millions of hard-working Americans, I urge my colleagues to step outside the Senate for a moment. Let's step outside the Senate and step into the homes of working-class and middle-class families across the country who see skyrocketing rates of tuition and wonder if college just isn't for people like them anymore. Step into the family room of parents praying that scholarships might make a college degree possible for their children or talk to the student who is just as smart, just as hard-working as anybody else but because of student loans and higher interest rates, sees the door to higher education as closed to them.

We live in a nation where the dreams of too many are determined by their

parents' paycheck. And in 2023, that means working- and middle-class families—with a disproportionate burden on communities of color, by the way—have to risk dangerous levels of debt just for a chance at achieving their American dream.

I remember what it felt like filling out financial aid forms and facing the brutal reality that when I was looking forward to attending the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the cost of tuition alone was bigger than my dad's W-2. I was only able to make it through because of Pell grants, scholarships, work study, and, yes, student loans, which took years to pay off.

So I know the real weight of student debt. And I also know what it is like to start thinking ahead to prepare my own son's college education.

And as it turns out, President Biden's plan is not just good for everybody; I mentioned earlier that it is a part of helping address the racial wealth gap in America. One statistic alone, his plan would mean almost half of Latino borrowers would see their entire debt forgiven. That is not just liberating. That is a wise investment for all of us.

The increased relief for Pell grants that is part of the plan would uplift communities of color and cut into the racial wealth gap in America. Two more statistics that are worth noting: Almost 71 percent of Black undergraduate borrowers and 65 percent of Latino students receive this grant.

The President's plan will mean that a generation of students would be able to begin their careers and build a life without the weight of student debt holding them back.

In California alone, it would bring relief to over 3.5 million eligible borrowers, an undeniable boost to our economy and to families throughout the State.

Let me underscore something else about this CRA. It is not just about what it threatens prospectively. If this program is overturned, if this resolution were to pass, 43 million Federal student loan borrowers would have to pay back months of payments and interest that had been relieved, forcing Americans into delinquency or worse: default.

Republicans seem determined to prevent relief to tens of millions of Americans, despite the fact that 90 percent of the relief would go to those earning less than \$75,000 a year.

In one fell swoop, it would cause unthinkable confusion and chaos for Federal student loan borrowers and make clear that, once again, Republicans view the American dream as a premium and higher education as a luxury, only for the wealthiest, only for those who can afford it.

I refuse to accept that fate. I urge my colleagues to see the real cost of today's CRA on working families. I assure you that the real impact won't fall on the wealthy families. It will be the working families of California and across the country whose lives will be

fundamentally altered should we fail them today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

DEBT CEILING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this is a historic day in the annals of the U.S. Senate because we are faced with a critical role as to whether we can pass the bipartisan compromise on spending or default on our debt for the first time in history, whether we will fail as a nation for the first time ever—ever—to pay our bills.

There is a strange construction in the law where we can vote in the Senate and in the House for spending, send it to the President, who signs it into law, go back to our States and districts and announce in press conferences that we have millions of dollars coming home—Federal dollars—back home to our States and districts and take credit for it and then not face the reality that the money appropriated actually adds to our national debt.

The debt ceiling is the mortgage of the United States, which needs to be expanded as we spend money. So we reached a point where we have a deadline—first June 1 and now June 5—of doing something in Congress to extend the Nation's mortgage or default on that mortgage and debts for the first time in history.

There was a ferocious negotiation that went on for weeks. It was precipitated by the threat of one person on Capitol Hill, Speaker KEVIN MCCARTHY, who said: I am willing to risk defaulting on America's debt. All the other leaders, including the Republican leader in the Senate and the Democratic leader, said that is unthinkable; we would pay a price for that for generations to come. The reputation of the United States, the value of the U.S. dollar would be in danger because of such a careless and reckless act.

So negotiation was underway for the last few weeks; an agreement was reached to Speaker MCCARTHY's satisfaction; and it passed the U.S. House of Representatives yesterday.

Now it is our turn in the Senate. We have taken a look at this agreement. First, let me say the premise is this. Defaulting on our national debt is unacceptable, unthinkable. We cannot let it occur.

So as painful as some of the decisions that will come from this agreement reached, they are virtually, at this point, inevitable to avoid default on our debt.

There is one I want to zero in on because it means so much to everyone in this Nation—and most people don't realize that it has been part of the debate and negotiation in this compromise—and that is the question of America's commitment to medical research.

The National Institutes of Health is the preeminent medical research institution in the world—in the world. When it comes to discovering cures for diseases, new medications, it is the National Institutes of Health and the

Food and Drug Administration which are charged with that responsibility, and we lead the world in research. I am such a fan of this Agency that I can speak for a long time about what they are doing.

But suffice it to say, if you or a member of your family have a diagnosis from a doctor that scares you to death, one of your first questions is, Doctor, is there anything we can do? Is there a medicine? Is there a surgery? Is there anything we can do?

Some of us have asked that question and we pray that the answer is yes and we pray that it leads us back to the NIH and all the work they put in.

So here is what we face with the budget agreement that passed the House, now headed to the Senate. We asked the experts on the budget to tell us what is going to happen to the budget of the National Institutes of Health—the preeminent medical Agency in the world—as a result of Speaker MCCARTHY'S demand that we cut spending. What will happen is this. We face this prospect almost with certainty. We are going to see a cut in the NIH spending for the first time in 10 years. For 10 years, we have consistently increased research funds, and they paid off. Finding that vaccine for COVID as quickly as we did was no accident. It was planned through medical research. And it saved so many thousands of lives here in the United States and beyond.

So here we face, for the first time in 10 years, a cut in the budget of the National Institutes of Health. How much of a cut? At least \$500 million—\$500 million.

And I stepped back, and I thought to myself, you mean, we are going to cut medical research? That was Speaker MCCARTHY'S idea of fiscal conservatism? That, to me, is mindless. It may have some political goal in mind, and I don't know what it might be, but to cut that makes no sense.

And let me suggest that my colleagues want to cut wasteful spending in Federal Government, and there is plenty of it. I know one obvious place to start. This projected cut of \$500 million happens to match almost exactly the amount of money we waste each year maintaining an offshore military prison that only serves to violate our fundamental values and undermine the rule of law. You probably know what I am referring to: Guantanamo. In the 21 years since Guantanamo first opened, American taxpayers have wasted more the \$7 billion on that facility—\$7 billion. This \$7 billion monument to bureaucracy and failed policy costs us \$500 million a year to maintain now, the same amount we are cutting from medical research to maintain Guantanamo Bay.

You say to yourself, well, if it keeps us safe, it is worth it. How many detainees are being held by the United States of America today at the Guantanamo facility? Thirty. Thirty for \$500 million a year. That is almost \$17 mil-

lion per year, per prisoner. Florence, CO, has a maximum-security prison for the United States of America. To maintain those prisoners in that maximum-security facility is around \$30,000 a year. When it comes to Guantanamo, maintaining a facility for 30 of these detainees is costing us \$17 million per detainee.

You know who called that a crazy idea? None other than former President Donald Trump.

For what great purpose are American taxpayers paying more than half a billion dollars every year to keep Guantanamo open? Is it to keep America safe, to detain convicted terrorists and threats to America? Guess again. Because right now, 16 of the 30 remaining detainees—more than half of them—have already been approved for release. That means we are wasting hundreds of millions of dollars every year to detain men who should have already been released. What is more, there are 10 other detainees who are still awaiting trials in the facility's dysfunctional military commissions.

How can we possibly explain to the world—let alone to our own citizens—that we have detained people for over 20 years and never charged them with a crime? The trial against five men charged in relation to 9/11 has not even begun, more than 2 decades since the attack on the United States.

And those who follow the military commissions the closest can tell you that these trials, let alone any convictions that might come down on appeal, are nowhere in sight. There is not even a plan.

Former Bush administration Solicitor General Ted Olson has a special level of expertise and interest in this issue. Ted also was chosen by the Bush administration to argue their cases before the Supreme Court. He is a respected lawyer in Washington, DC. Sadly, on 9/11, 2001, Ted Olson's wife died when a plane crashed into the Pentagon. She was a passenger. So he has a special interest in this matter and a special level of expertise.

Here is what he wrote about the idea of trials by military commissions of detainees at Guantanamo. He said they were “doomed from the start.” He is calling for the Biden administration to negotiate guilty pleas with all the 9/11 defendants. To state the obvious, we are failing the victims of 9/11 and their families by continuing the Guantanamo charade. These military commissions, which were supposed to be the court of law trying the detainees, have not or are unlikely to ever deliver justice.

In December of 2021, I chaired a hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Guantanamo. One of our witnesses was Colleen Kelly, a nurse practitioner from the Bronx, mother of three. She testified about losing her younger brother Bill on 9/11. He was in the North Tower when the first plane crashed. Colleen described the pain of waiting—waiting almost 20 years after

Bill's death, year after year after year—for something to happen.

In March, I received a letter from a young woman named Leila Murphy. She was 3 years old when her father Brian died on 9/11. For nearly 22 years, Leila Murphy has waited for a trial that has never come. In her letter to me, she pleaded with our government to bring this process to an end by securing guilty pleas from defendants in the 9/11 cases.

Leila, Colleen, and Ted Olson are not alone in calling on the Biden administration to finally deliver a shred of justice to the victims of 9/11 and their loved ones through guilty pleas. Just last week, Leila and several of the children and grandchildren of the victims who died on 9/11 wrote to the President. Here is what they said. They implored him to salvage “whatever justice can still be had for the parents and grandparents we lost . . . [do] not let [this] drag on any longer,” these survivors begged.

The signers in that letter included three daughters of New York firefighter Douglas Miller. He was among the more than 340 firefighters in New York who were killed when the towers collapsed. If you have seen the programs dedicated to these men and women, you cannot forget the bravery they demonstrated that day.

At the time of Mr. Miller's death, his daughters were just children. His first-born Elizabeth was 7; Rachel was 6; Katie was 4. He and his wife Laurie had been sweethearts since high school. In their letter, Mr. Miller's daughters and other signers expressed how hopeful they felt last year when the 9/11 prosecution team began negotiations to finally obtain guilty pleas from defendants. They considered it a breakthrough that would finally bring closure; that would finally provide answers they had sought for more than 20 years.

But their hopes were crushed when the prosecution team recently indicated they are now going to start to open the pretrial litigation again. That was devastating news for these children, like Mr. Miller's daughters. In their letter, they wrote:

The thought of going back to endless courtroom proceedings, when more than 10 years of litigation did not lead to trial, is painful.

Returning to pretrial purgatory will not deliver justice to the loved ones that lost the people that they cared for so much. The only way to do this is by securing guilty pleas in the 9/11 cases.

And let's be honest, this will not be the full measure of justice these families deserve. Sadly—sadly—this is no longer possible. Because these families were robbed of true justice when the administration at the time decided to torture and abuse detainees in our Nation's custody and throw them into an untested legal black hole rather than trusting America's time-honored system of justice.

As Ted Olson wrote a few months ago:

Nothing will bring back the thousands whose lives were so cruelly taken that September day. But we must face reality and bring this process to an end. The American legal system must move on by closing the book on the military commissions and securing guilty pleas.

The Biden administration must complete the interagency process to review the terms of the plea deals without further delay. Securing guilty pleas from the detainees who had been charged with a crime will bring us one step closer to ending the shameful chapter of Guantanamo.

These men will then serve out their sentences—some for the rest of their lives.

When it comes to the detainees who had not been charged, they should be released. That means the State Department must find countries who will take the 16 men for the approved transfer. It is not an easy assignment, but it is one that is inevitable.

The United States is a Nation of laws. When we indefinitely detain people who have never been charged with a crime and who have been deemed safe to release, we are betraying our own basic constitutional values. And autocrats abroad point to the history of abuse and detention without charge or trial to justify their own human rights abuses. If you want to stand for liberty and the rule of law, be honest with the American people.

Guantanamo Bay is a blight on our national conscience, and it has been for a long period of time. It is time for us to accept reality. It is not only a waste—tremendous waste—of taxpayer dollars, but it is an injustice that must end.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

H. J. RES. 45

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in opposition to a cruel and misguided attack on millions of student loan borrowers in New Jersey and across the country. I understand that some of my colleagues are intent on overturning President Biden's signature policies no matter the cost or the consequence. But to overturn his landmark student debt relief program just to score political points, to force borrowers to pay back their loans with interest and stick it to the administration, well, that, to me, is just cruelty for the sake of cruelty.

How else can you describe a proposal that would strip away one of the most important economic lifelines borrowers have relied on? Other than cruel, what else can you call a resolution that rips away benefits for up to 43 million Americans who stand to benefit from President Biden's relief plan?

I remind my colleagues that the pause on student loan repayments has saved borrowers an average of over \$233 per month, an amount that is particularly crucial for our Nation's teachers, nurses, police officers, and firefighters who rely on the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

For a moment, I would like to focus on the impact this resolution has on them, because for these public service employees, \$233 can mean the difference between making it to the end of the month or not. Make no mistake. Repealing this relief especially hurts public sector workers all across the country—the very people who go to work every day to care for us, protect us, educate our kids and keep us safe.

Is this body really trying to claw back benefits from thousands of everyday heroes in our communities? Is this really what my colleagues set out to do?

For years, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program has enjoyed bipartisan support because it is essential to the promise of America. After all, if you take out loans in support of an education for a career benefiting others, then you deserve to see your balance forgiven after 120 payments or 10 years, as outlined under the law.

For many individuals, the economic challenges of COVID and the reforms that occurred as a result were the first time that they were able to enjoy the program's benefits. This harmful proposal erases that progress and, once again, imposes the burden of debt on hard-working teachers, nurses, police officers, and firefighters. This proposal is a slap in the face to them and to their shot at the American dream—full stop.

It is a slap in the face for Public Service Loan Forgiveness borrowers and for the full universe of Americans who stand to benefit from student loan relief, which is why I encourage all of my colleagues to ask themselves: Is this vote—this misguided proposal—the kind of message you feel proud to send? When the history books are written about this moment in time, do you want to stand on the side of the 43 million Americans who have played by the rules and stand to benefit from long overdue student loan forgiveness, or do you want to stand on the side of those who punish hard-working Americans for trying to get ahead? That, to me, is the stark moral decision that is before this Chamber.

With your vote, you can choose to support the borrowers you represent by rejecting this plan, or you can blind-side them, rolling back nearly 8 months of interest benefits they have earned and deserve.

In no uncertain terms, this resolution increases the yoke of student loan debt and sets up borrowers to fail. That is not something that I want to vote for, and it is not something that any Member of this Chamber should want to vote for. I urge my colleagues to vote no.

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

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

DEBT CEILING

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, Senator COTTON will be here in a second. A group of us are going to speak about this budget deal.

If you believe that the No. 1 job of the Federal Government is to defend this Nation, then we have made a serious mistake in this bill.

I have heard House leaders suggest this bill fully funds the military. For that to be true, you would have to believe that the military is OK if you cut their budget \$42 billion below inflation. The party of Ronald Reagan would never allow inflation to reduce defense capabilities.

This bill, the top-line number, locks in fewer ships for the Navy at a time China is going to expand dramatically. In 2024 and 2025, we are going to cap spending at a level that we cannot expand the Navy, and in the same period of time, China is going to go from 310 ships over a 10-year period to 440. There is less money for the Marines, less money for the Army, and fewer ships for the Navy at a time of great conflict.

There is not a penny in this bill to help Ukraine defeat Putin. They are going on the offensive as I speak, and we need to send a clear message to Putin: When it comes to your invasion of Ukraine, we are going to support the Ukrainians to ensure your loss.

If we don't do that, then we are going to snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory.

Senator COTTON—I am going to yield to him. He has a time problem. But we are going to take some time here to explain to you why those of us who believe that the No. 1 job of the Federal Government is to defend the Nation—that that concept has been abandoned and that we are going to insist and fight until we find a way to rectify some of this harm. OK.

With that, I will yield to my good friend from Mississippi.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. I can assure my friend from South Carolina that when Senator COTTON reaches the floor, I will yield to him because he is time-constrained.

What I want to say is what I have been saying all along this year since the Biden budget came out. The world is in the most dangerous situation we have seen since World War II, and this Biden budget, which is now enshrined in this debt ceiling bill, is woefully inadequate. It amounts to a cut in defense capability. It sounds like an increase. You can call it an increase. But inflation is running at 7 percent, and so we will have to increase defense spending by that much simply to keep up with what we did last year, and we would have to increase by several billions more in order to give us the capability we need to prevent war in the Pacific. So I just have to say that the

fact that this is being called a victory by some people on our side of the aisle is absolutely inaccurate.

Pundits around the country have called this budget amount inadequate, and now, for some reason, because it is part of an agreement the Speaker has made, it is being applauded. The numbers don't lie.

I will tell you this. I will say this to my friends. We have 3 or 4 years to get ready for the time when Xi Jinping, the dictator President-for-life in communist China, says he wants to be ready for a war against the United States, a war to take over the island of Taiwan.

The decisions we make today can be implemented—if we have the resolve to do them—by 2027, but we need to make those decisions this year. We don't need to put them off until next year, and we certainly don't need to say we are going to go with the Biden cuts in readiness and do 1 percent more next year. That is woefully inadequate.

Let me say this before I yield to my friend from Alaska. It is easy to hide in the budget—one sentence, and then I will yield to my friend from Arkansas.

It is easy to hide inadequacies in a defense budget. People still get their Social Security checks. They still get their paychecks. When it comes home to roost for us is when a conflict breaks out.

We weren't ready for World War II, and when the flag went up and we were in a war, suddenly we were way, way behind. We were ready under President Reagan, and we had peace under President Reagan. When we are ready, we have the ability to avoid conflict, and this budget simply does not do that.

I will yield the floor and let my friend from Arkansas seek recognition.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, after weeks of negotiating with an obstinate and capricious President, the House of Representatives passed legislation yesterday raising the debt ceiling and establishing budget caps for the next 2 years. Both Democrats and Republicans compromised in these negotiations, and, like every piece of compromise legislation, there are good parts and bad parts of this bill.

I want to commend Speaker MCCARTHY for a number of commonsense victories. This bill improves the environmental review process for infrastructure projects, cuts funding for President Biden's army of IRS agents, and saves American taxpayers tens of billions of dollars by clawing back unused COVID funds.

Now, the bill doesn't go as far as I might like. It reduces domestic spending to last year's levels, which is better than even more spending and taxes, as the Democrats proposed, but I think domestic spending could return to prepandemic levels. COVID emergency legislation was just that—an emergency compelled by Chinese communist lies. It shouldn't reset the Fed-

eral Government's budget in perpetuity. But, again, I sympathize with the Speaker's constraints of a small House majority and negotiating with a Democratic Party that seems to prioritize welfare for grown men who won't work over our military.

As I have noted, there are some victories in this bill, and it prevents default.

Unfortunately, this bill poses a mortal risk to our national security by cutting our defense budget, which I cannot support, as grave dangers gather on the horizon.

The bill's supporters contend that it raises defense spending by 3.2 percent compared to last year. That is true at face value, but inflation was 6 percent last year. When you get a 3-percent raise but prices go up by 6 percent, even a small child could tell you that your money won't go as far and your family will have to tighten their belt. And it gets worse next year, when the defense budget will grow by only 1 percent. Who thinks Joe Biden will get inflation to prepandemic levels? Even if he did, inflation would grow at least twice as fast as the defense budget, causing even more real cuts to defense.

Worst of all, this bill contains an automatic 1 percent sequester based off last year's budget. That means that domestic spending will go up, and defense spending will go down if the sequester kicks in. Let me repeat that. If the sequester takes effect, Democrats will get more welfare spending, while defense gets cut. Who thinks the Democratic leader will be dissatisfied with this result? More to the point, who thinks he won't use the threat of sequester to extort even higher levels of welfare spending?

These three provisions—a cut this year in real dollars, a worse cut in real dollars for 2025, and the automatic sequester based on last year's spending bills—conspire to threaten devastating cuts to the defense budget at a time when we can least afford it.

The bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission Report recommends a real increase to defense spending of between 3 and 5 percent annually over inflation. This bill would cut real spending by more than 5 percent in 2 years, effectively slashing tens of billions of dollars from defense.

How bad is this defense gap? If we continued our recent bipartisan custom of increasing the defense budget from President Biden's irresponsible budget proposals, we could afford four additional *Ford*-class aircraft carriers, 500 F-35 fighter jets, more than 91,000 Stinger missiles, or half a million Javelin anti-tank missiles—all vital to our defense and to the defense of Ukraine and Taiwan.

While we surrender our lead and erode our military edge our enemies are catching up. Last year, Russia increased its real military spending over inflation by 1 percent; China increased its real spending by over 6 percent; and Iran increased its real spending by over

8 percent. The United States reduced our real spending by over 3 percent, and this bill, as I have said, would only make matters worse.

For years, Washington has gotten defense spending backward. The budget shouldn't shape our defense needs. Indeed, it cannot shape our defense needs. Our defense needs have to shape our budget.

China doesn't become less aggressive or Russia less revanchist or Iran less extreme because our military has shrunk. In fact, the opposite is true; they grow more ambitious and dangerous.

The defense budget should rise and fall with the dangers confronting our Nation, and I do not believe those dangers are receding. Who here believes the world here is safer or more stable than it was a year ago or 2 years ago? On the contrary, America is in greater danger than at any time in my life. Iran is rushing toward a nuclear bomb; Russia has unleashed the largest European invasion since the Second World War; and China is plotting the conquest of Taiwan. Our military stockpiles are depleted and our defense supply chains are broken or strained. At the same time, our border defenses have effectively collapsed, and cartel members, criminal aliens, and possibly even terrorists are pouring into our country. We need a military to match this perilous moment. After all, protecting the safety and security of our people is our first and most fundamental responsibility.

We cannot shortchange the military today without grave risks tomorrow. The weapons we buy this year will be the ones we field in 2027, the time by which China will be at its greatest relative strength compared to the United States and when war is most likely.

Now, I know that holding firm on defense priorities isn't always easy. As I said, there are parts of this bill that I support, but I cannot support the bill because it does not adequately fund our military given the threats we face.

Supporters of the bill contend that the situation isn't as bad as I make it out to be. Their arguments don't hold up under scrutiny. Some claim that we could still get more defense funding through a supplemental bill or some other backdoor funding mechanism. But these same hollow promises were made when Congress passed the Budget Control Act of 2011, which devastated our military under President Obama. I ran for the Senate, in part, to reverse that disaster, and I won't vote for a new disaster with the same promises.

And as I have explained, the sequester in this bill actually produces more domestic spending than the bill's core provisions, which encourages irresponsible Democrats to trigger sequester.

Others have claimed that we can find efficiencies in the Pentagon to make up the difference. I don't disagree that there is fat to trim in some places in our military, but no serious person thinks that it is enough to make up for

tens of billions of dollars in cuts. Moreover, this claim assumes the Biden administration will put our readiness ahead of social engineering. Color me skeptical on that one when they start looking for efficiencies.

Still, other supporters have shrugged and deployed the commonly used but rarely persuasive argument that the bill may be bad, but there is no alternative, and it is too late anyway. But it was and it remains our job to craft an alternative.

We hear a lot that things that add votes to these big bills get in and things that subtract votes don't. Again, we know, from recent experience the last two National Defense Authorization Acts, that a higher defense number gets nearly 400 votes in the House and more than 80 votes in the Senate. The first thing—the first thing—that should have been settled in these negotiations was a larger defense budget. Democrats have no argument against that recent history, and it is indisputable that increases to Joe Biden's defense budgets garner large bipartisan majorities in the House and the Senate.

So why wasn't it the first thing settled? I don't know, but the result is that a Congress with a Republican House and a Democratic Senate have now produced a defense budget worse in real terms than either defense budget produced by a unified Democratic Congress. I cannot vote for that curious result. If it takes a short-term increase in the debt ceiling to go back to the drawing board, so be it.

Before we vote, I would also ask all my fellow Senators a simple question: Do you feel more safe or less safe than you did a year ago? If you feel more safe, by all means, vote to slash our defense budget. But if not—and in your heart of hearts you know you don't—join me in demanding that we do what it takes to protect our Nation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KING). The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. I just want to compliment Senator COTTON for reminding us what the job in Congress is, defending the Nation, and the odd outcome here is that at a time of growing conflict, we are reducing the Navy.

There are 296 ships in the Navy today. Under this budget, by 2025, there will be 286. If we continue with the Biden budget, there will be 290. The Chinese Navy today is 340. By 2025, they will have 400, and by 2030 they will have 440. This budget locks in a smaller U.S. Navy at a time the Chinese Navy is growing dramatically.

There is not a penny in this budget to help beat Putin. The Navy is smaller. The Army is smaller. The Marine Corps is smaller. This is not a threat-based budget. This is a budget of political compromise where people have lost sight of what the country needs.

We need safety and security.

To my House colleagues, I can't believe you did this.

To the Speaker, I know you have got a tough job. I like you, but the party of Ronald Reagan is dying. Don't tell me that a defense budget that is \$42 billion below inflation fully funds the military.

Don't tell me that we can confront and challenge China. Everybody in this body is patting themselves on the back that we see China as the most existential threat to America. You are right. We did the CHIPS Act. We are doing things to help our economy combat China. At the moment of decision when it came to the military, this budget is a win for China. Please don't go home and say this is fully funded because it is not. Please stop talking about confronting China when you are dismantling the American Navy.

How does this end? Senator COTTON is right. We will be here until Tuesday, until I get commitments that we are going to rectify some of these problems. The ranking member of the Appropriations Committee, SUSAN COLLINS, has been steadfastly in the camp of fiscal responsibility and national security. This deal has taken the Appropriations Committee out of the game.

The CR, which kicks in, cuts defense and increases nondefense, making it really hard for me to believe that we are actually going to do our appropriations job.

So what I want to do is, I want a commitment from the leaders of this body that we are not pulling the plug on Ukraine. There is not a penny in this bill for future efforts to help Ukraine defeat Russia, and they are going to gain on the battlefield in the coming days.

And it is just not about Ukraine. I want a commitment that we will have a supplemental to make us better able to deal with China. I want a commitment that we are not going to weaken our position in the Mideast. There is a report out today that Iran is planning to attack our troops in Syria to drive us out.

We are expending weapons that need to be replenished. Our military is weakening by the day. This budget that we are about to pass makes every problem worse.

I want to end the war in Ukraine by defeating Putin. If you don't, he keeps going and we are going to have a conflict between NATO and Russia and our troops will be involved. And if you don't send a clear signal now, China will see this as an opportunity to leap into Taiwan.

So to the Members of this body, we are staying here as long as it takes to get some commitment that we are going to reverse this debacle sooner rather than later.

With that, I will yield to my good friend from Alaska.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent for 10 minutes for my remarks as well as 10 minutes for Senator WICKER and Senator COLLINS' remarks before the vote.

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

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I think my colleagues are making the really important point of the national security implications of the bill that we are looking at and voting on. And I agree with what my colleagues have already said. Speaker MCCARTHY had a difficult job. I think there is a lot in this debt agreement that is important, that is positive. But the one thing we are not doing here—and, by the way, it is the most important thing we do as U.S. Senators—is have a strategy for the national defense of our Nation during an incredibly dangerous time globally. We are not doing that.

We need a strategy. Already, my good friend from South Carolina mentioned some ideas. I am going to touch on those, but let's just reiterate. The Presiding Officer sits on the Armed Services Committee. Many of us do. We get witness after witness, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense, saying this is the most dangerous time since any period in history since World War II. That is the consensus. Not a lot of people would disagree with that. Authoritarian dictators, with an immense appetite for conquest, are on the march, and yet what does this budget agreement do? It cuts defense spending significantly, as already mentioned.

Now, some people will say: Well, look at the top line. We never had a higher top line—\$800-plus billion. As the Presiding Officer knows, the actual real measure of how serious we are as a country isn't the top line. Because of inflation over the years it is hard to compare.

The real measure of how serious we are, in terms of what we are putting toward defense—what the No. 1 priority of the U.S. Congress should be, in my view—is what percentage of our national wealth we are dedicating to defense. This budget will take us, in the next 2 years, with the cut this year, an inflation-adjusted cut of 4 to 5 percent, and a nominal increase next year of 1 percent, which would be about a 5- to 6-percent cut—it will take us below the 3 percent of GDP number for defense for the first time since 1999, during the peace dividend era of the Clinton administration. So we will be below 3 percent of GDP.

When you look at different periods of American history, the Korean war, we were at almost 15 percent; Vietnam, 8 percent; Cold War Reagan buildup, almost 6 percent; Iraq, Afghanistan, War on Terror, 4.5 percent, we are going to be going below 3 percent. It hasn't happened since 1999, and before that it has almost never happened in the history of the country, at least in the 20th century.

Here is the most important point: In 1999, the threats to our Nation weren't nearly as dramatic and serious as they are today, and nobody disagrees with that.

So what this budget does is it just accepts the Biden defense budget, which,

as Senator GRAHAM has already mentioned, shrinks the Army, shrinks the Navy, shrinks the Marine Corps. That is what it does: less ships, not more ships; smaller number of soldiers and marines, not more. So accepting the Biden defense budget is actually something new during the Biden administration.

What do I mean by that? As Senator COTTON mentioned, the last two previous Biden budgets came in, in anemic numbers, and in a bipartisan way—a strong bipartisan way, by the way—Democrats and Republicans significantly plussed-up those budget numbers. Last year, it was a \$45 billion increase to the weak Biden budget on the Armed Services Committee that every single Senator on the committee voted for, except one. That is about as bipartisan as you can get. The year before, it was a \$25 billion plus-up. And as many people know, we were already discussing, in a bipartisan way on the Armed Services Committee, another significant plus-up to this Biden budget. So Democrats and Republicans knew it was weak and not sufficient to meet the challenges of today.

But what happened? The music stopped, and now all of a sudden we are accepting the Biden budget. I know Democrat Senators who think that is wrong. They think that is wrong.

One amendment I am going to offer, as we are debating this, is to do something very simple. It is to look at the Biden Pentagon's priority list—their unfunded priority list—that this President and his Secretary of Defense put forward. It is \$18 billion, which the Armed Services Committee, in a bipartisan way, was already getting ready to agree to move forward and fund. I am going to ask my colleagues to fund it. At a minimum, let's fund it. We are not going to bust out of the top line of this agreement. We will just take that \$18.4 billion and move it from the \$80 billion IRS account and put it to the Pentagon. It is pretty simple. It should be 100 to 0.

Do we want more Navy ships, more marines, or more IRS agents during this very dangerous time? I think the answer is pretty clear. I think the American people know the answer.

Senator COTTON already mentioned this idea that the Speaker has talked about. We need more efficiencies in the Pentagon. I couldn't agree more. By the way, the Navy leadership right now—we need a lot more efficiencies out of that place. You have a Navy Secretary who is more focused on getting his climate plan out before his shipbuilding plan. The priorities of the Department of the Navy right now are remarkably misaligned with real-world challenges.

What are those real-world challenges?

I think the Presiding Officer was there when we had a briefing from some of our top Intelligence Agency officials. It was a classified briefing, and I asked him if this number was classi-

fied. They told me no. They came out and said the real Chinese budget, in terms of the military, is probably close to about \$700 billion. That is a big budget. As Senator COTTON mentioned, they are increasing in real terms 6, 7, 8 percent—cranking out ships, cranking out fifth-generation aircraft.

And we are going to cut the budget this year and dramatically cut it next year and go under 3 percent of the GDP in one of the most dangerous times since the end of World War II?

As Senator COTTON also mentioned, the National Defense Strategy Commission, which the Congress authorized a number of years ago to look at the serious national security threats facing our country, came back to the Armed Services Committee 2 years ago and said: What we need to do to address these serious national security challenges from China, from Russia, from Iran is to have 3 to 5 percent real GDP—or real growth—on the defense budget.

That was broadly accepted by Democrats and Republicans. As a matter of fact, I think one of the members of that national security commission is now the Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Biden administration.

But we are not even close. We are going backward.

Then Senator GRAHAM's point about a supplemental to get Leader SCHUMER and the President to say “we are going to have a supplemental for deterring authoritarian aggression” is going to be critical. I would say the vast majority of my colleagues here—Democrats and Republicans—would support that. We need a serious, robust defense budget to deter war. If the young men and women who volunteer to serve in our military are asked to go fight a war, we need a strong budget so that they can come home victorious and not come home in body bags.

This is deadly serious business, and we are not putting enough attention to it. It is one of the No. 1 things in the U.S. Constitution: that we need to provide for the common defense, to raise and support an Army, and to provide and maintain a Navy. That is our job, and we are not doing it. With this budget, this rushed budget, we need to get serious, and, hopefully, in the next few days, we can do that as we debate this agreement.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized to speak for up to 10 minutes.

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

Mr. ROUNDS. Mr. President, my colleagues today have all had the same concern. That is, while we recognize the need to address the debt limit that our country is now up against, we also recognize that the defense of our country is a critical and necessary part of our responsibility as well.

The concern that many of us have with the proposal right now is that, in

order to raise the debt limit, part of it has a series of conditions with regard to what happens to the dollars that it takes to actually defend our country for the next 2 years. We want to be able to raise the debt limit—we recognize that—but we also have to address the need for the defense of our country.

Why should we, as a part of the negotiation, be required to look at a reduction—a reduction—in the amount of dollars necessary for our young men and women to be able to defend our country?

Within the provisions of this bill, there is a reduction of up to 1 percent of the existing budget if we don't do an appropriations process. Yet, in order to do the appropriations process, we have to have 12 separate bills. The 12 separate bills all have to be passed. Now, the U.S. Senate is not known for necessarily doing anything on time. Yet here we come up to the end of the fiscal year in October, and we haven't seen appropriations bills on the floor yet.

What we need to be able to do, rather than to have a 1-percent reduction in defense, is to have an agreement that we will at least allow the appropriations bills to go from the Appropriations Committee to the floor of the Senate so that we can address them up or down, with the appropriate amendments on them, and have a full discussion but do it in a timely fashion.

So, No. 1, let's address the debt limit, but let's not penalize our ability to defend our country—or, perhaps, more appropriately say, let's not limit the ability of our young men and women in uniform to defend our country.

My colleagues have done a great job of explaining what happens here if we don't do our job correctly with regard to this particular bill. No. 1, if we go to a continuing resolution, our defense budget goes down; but, No. 2, under the provisions of this bill, the nondefense portions of this budget could actually go up. So there is an incentive—an unfair incentive—built into this to spend more on domestic programs and to spend less to defend our country, which is our primary responsibility.

How do we fix it at this late stage of the game?

No. 1, there are supplementals that are absolutely necessary. We have aggressive authoritarians throughout the world who are right now looking to see whether or not we are prepared to support our allies and those individuals who are on the front lines. This is specifically in Ukraine, specifically looking, as well, in the South Pacific, and looking at Taiwan and doing our best to turn Taiwan into a porcupine to make it much less of a possibility that China will invade Taiwan.

The other piece of this, along with that, is that we have to do an appropriations process where we actually get a chance to look at the Defense bill and our other appropriations bills in a timely fashion so that we do not have a continuing resolution in which the defense of our country loses ground,

making it more vulnerable or our country more vulnerable and a more challenging job for the young men and women who wear the uniform of this country.

With that, I just want to say thank you to my colleagues who have laid out some great numbers for all of us and who clearly have laid out a path forward: a commitment by leadership that the appropriations process be completed in a timely fashion and a recognition that supplemental funding will be necessary to confront aggressive authoritarians throughout the world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for 5 minutes.

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

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I yield my time to our next speaker, who is the ranking member of the Appropriations Committee, but I just want to say one thing before she speaks.

The Chief of Naval Operations said we need 373 ships manned and 150 unmanned platforms to deal with the threats we face around the world. We have 296 today. Under this budget deal, we will go to 286 by 2025. What does it take to get 373? The CNO of the Navy said, to get 373 ships, you have got to spend 5 percent above inflation for a sustained period of time. This bill is 2 percent below inflation. So we are undercutting the ability of the Navy to build the ships we need to defend America.

With that, I yield to Senator COLLINS.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, shortly, the Senate will consider the debt ceiling package that passed the House last night by a strong vote.

I commend the Speaker for his hard work and his negotiations to prevent what would be a disastrous default, with catastrophic consequences for our economy, for the people who rely on important government programs, and for America's standing in the world. Nevertheless, there are two issues in this package that are very problematic.

The first, as you have heard from my colleagues, is the completely inadequate top-line number for our national defense.

The second is a harmful provision that would go into effect if any 1 of the 12 appropriations bills has not been signed into law. It would trigger an automatic, meat-ax, indiscriminate, across-the-board cut in our already inadequate defense budget and in the domestic discretionary nondefense funding. This would happen automatically if, in fact, all 12 appropriations bills have not been passed.

Now let me address both of those issues and offer to my colleagues what I believe are solutions.

The first is the inadequacy of the defense budget. As my colleagues have very well described, the defense budget submitted by President Biden and included as the top line in this package is insufficient to the task of fully implementing the national defense strategy at a time when we face serious and growing threats around the world.

As my friends and colleagues from South Carolina and Alaska and others have already described, this budget request would actually shrink the size of our Navy. We would end up with a fleet of 291 ships. Those are 6 ships fewer than today's fleet of 297 ships, and it is further—further—away from the Chief of Naval Operations' requirement, which is informed by scenarios involving China, for example. Meanwhile, what is China doing? China has the largest navy in the world now, and it is growing to 400 ships in the next 2 years.

The story is very similar if you look at the Air Force's tactical aircraft. So we have a real problem.

Let me give you another example. It is an example that all of us can relate to who fill our cars with gas or seek to heat our homes.

This budget request falls woefully short in funding the fuel costs of our military. The Government Accountability Office says the DOD's fuel costs are likely to be 20 percent higher than the amount of money that is included in the President's budget.

I asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, what the result would be, and he says it very clearly: It would translate into 20 percent fewer flying hours and steaming days, which would harm our military's training and readiness. So that is a very concrete area where the President's budget is clearly not going to be adequate.

Second is the harmful provision with the automatic 1 percent cut across the board. Think about this, if you are the Secretary of Defense. Let's say the Department of Defense appropriations bill is signed into law before the start of the fiscal year in October, as I hope that it will be, and I am working hard. It doesn't matter. Let's say the leg branch appropriations bill isn't signed into law by January 1 of next year. An order goes out that has to be implemented by April 30 which would cut every account across the board by 1 percent. How does that make sense? Think how harmful that would be. How in the world is the military going to enter into contracts if it doesn't know what its budget is going to be, despite the fact that its appropriations bill has been signed into law, but because of this threat hanging over the Department.

So what do we do? I don't want to see our country default for the first time in history. I do believe that would have catastrophic consequences. But we need to fix these problems.

The first problem of an inadequate defense budget could be addressed and remedied by having an emergency de-

fense supplemental. That is what we need to do. That is what I would ask the administration and my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to commit to because we know that this budget is not adequate to the global threats that we face.

We know that it does nothing to deter Russian aggression in Ukraine. We know that it is not adequate to the challenge that we face from China. An emergency supplemental must be coming our way to remedy the first problem.

What should we do about the second problem, the threat of this 1 percent indiscriminate meat ax cut across the board? We need to pass each and every one of the 12 appropriations bills on time before the start of the fiscal year. In order to do that, I am working very hard with the chair of the committee, Senator MURRAY. But we need a commitment from the Senate majority leader that he will provide us with floor time. We will do our utmost to get every single one of the 12 appropriations bills marked up and reported out of the Appropriations Committee. But then I am asking the Senate majority leader to commit to bringing each of those bills to the Senate floor, either singly or individually or as minibuses, as we used to do, where we would pair a couple of the bills together. But it is essential. I would implore the Democratic leader to provide the commitment that he will bring each of the appropriations bills to the Senate floor so that we can avoid the threat of this indiscriminate, across-the-board cut.

I believe that is the path forward for us: an emergency defense supplemental to make up for the woefully inadequate budget that has been submitted by this administration for the Department of Defense for our national security; and, second, to prevent the 1 percent cut from ever being triggered, a commitment that all of the appropriations bills will be brought on time to the Senate floor.

Then, it seems to me, we can proceed with this package and avoid a catastrophic default for our country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. I want to echo what Senator COLLINS just suggested. How do you begin to turn this debacle around? You admit you have got a problem. It is pretty hard to quit drinking if you don't admit you have got a drinking problem.

So what she is suggesting is that we acknowledge the obvious, that this bill, on the defense side, is inadequate to the threats we face, that a bill that funds the Pentagon below inflation at a time of great threat is not fully funding. She is trying to get us to wake up to the reality that if we don't speak about defeating Putin now, then the Ukrainians, who are on the offense, will be undercut.

I will never let this happen again, as long as I am here, to let people negotiate behind closed doors and not tell

me what they are doing on defense. I blame myself for not being more involved and more active, because in my wildest dreams I never believed that the Republican Party would take the Biden budget that they have attacked for a year and celebrate it as fully funding. I know who I am dealing with now.

Here is what Reagan told the Russians: Trust but verify. I will never, ever trust again, because you have got an ‘R’ behind your name, that you are going to be the party of Ronald Reagan. You have to prove that to me. So, as we go forward, the game will change.

Why is she asking for this to be done? If we don’t commit to an orderly appropriations process, it gets worse for the Defense Department.

To the people who wrote this bill, I would not let you buy me a car.

The provisions of sequestration—for lack of a better word—the continuing resolution, if we don’t do our legislative business, increases nondefense spending and decreases defense spending. I thought we were Republicans. Who came up with that great idea?

The top line is inadequate. The CR is devastating. And what bothers me the most is that we would put the Department of Defense in this position.

We are playing with the lives of men and women in the military, their ability to defend themselves, as some chess game in Washington. Well, this is checkers, at best.

The fact that you would punish the military because we can’t do our job as politicians is a pretty sad moment for me. But people in this body, on my side of the aisle, have drafted a bill that would punish the military even more if we fail to do our basic job. That cannot be the way of the future.

So I will insist, or we will be here until Tuesday, and I will make an amendment to avoid default for 90 days or however many days it takes to get this right. I don’t want us to default on the debt, but we are not leaving town until we find a way to stop some of this madness. You are not going to be able to blame me for default because I am ready to raise the debt ceiling right now for 90 days, no strings attached, to give us a chance to stop this insane approach to national security.

I am supposed to talk to the President of Ukraine this afternoon. I would like to be able to tell him something: Oh, by the way, you have done a hell of a job with the money we have given you. Not one soldier has died. The weapons used by Ukraine have punished the Russian military. They are weakened and bloodied.

They are about to take back territory. He is wondering, well, what does this mean for the future? I want to try to be able to tell him that I have got an assurance from this body that we are not going to leave you hanging.

It is in our interest to beat Putin. I don’t like war more than anybody else, but if Putin gets away with invading

Ukraine, there goes Taiwan. And if you don’t get that, you are just out of touch. They have a chance to evict Russia from Ukrainian territory. They need more military help, not American soldiers.

If Putin loses, it is a deterrence for China. If Putin doesn’t lose, he will keep grabbing territory until we have a war between Russia and NATO. This is a big, big deal.

Iran is coming up with a plan, apparently, to drive us out of the Mideast. That just came out today.

China is building. As Senator COLLINS said, they are going from 340 ships to 440 ships by 2030. We are going from 296 to 290. That can’t be the response to China.

You cannot say with a straight face that this military budget is a counter to Chinese aggression, that it adequately allows us to defeat Putin. You cannot say with a straight face that this budget represents the threats America faces.

A military budget should be based on threats, not political deals to avoid default. Nobody wants to default. We are not going to default. But I am tired of having default hanging over my head as a reason to neuter the military at a time we need it the most.

To the American public, you would suffer if we defaulted. I get it. If this budget is the end of the discussion and we don’t fix it, your sons and daughters are going to have more war, not less. You are going to send a signal to all the bad guys that we are all talk. And what you will be doing is putting the world on a course of sustained conflict rather than deterrence.

The last time people did this was in the 1930s. They wanted to believe that Hitler wasn’t serious about killing all the Jews, that they only wanted some land, that he really didn’t want to take over the world. He wrote a book, and nobody believed him.

The Iranian Ayatollah speaks every day: I will destroy the state of Israel; that we are infidels, and he is going to drive us out of the region.

China openly confronts our planes—400 feet yesterday. They are testing us every day.

The bottom line, folks, is we are not leaving until we get a path to fix this problem. Senator SUSAN COLLINS, my good friend from Maine, gave us that path. If you want to go home, fix it.

I yield the floor.

H. J. RES. 45

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, if you are one of the over 43 million Americans with Federal student loan debt, today’s Republican measure attacking debt relief is a slap in the face. Even a casual examination of today’s CRA shows that is a cruel measure.

This is what Republicans are proposing: They not only want to sabotage President Biden’s student debt relief, they not only want to put a stop to future payment pauses, Republicans actually want to ask for payments and interest retroactively—from September to December of last year.

That is right; if you are a student loan borrower and were told that you didn’t have to worry about payments last fall, you could be back on the hook if Republicans get their way. This Republican bill is a student debt bait-and-switch, penalizing borrowers by an average of \$1,500 in extra payments.

And there is another twist in the knife: If you are a first responder, an educator, a member of the military, or any sort of employee in the public sector, the Republican bill could jeopardize your eligibility for the public service loan forgiveness program. We should be in the business of helping Americans saddled with student loan debt, not making their problems worse as this measure would do. I will vote no.

VOTE ON H. J. RES. 45

The joint resolution was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

Ms. HASSAN. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There has been a request for the yeas and nays.

Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET) and the Senator from Virginia (Mr. WARNER) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 135 Leg.]

YEAS—52

Barrasso	Grassley	Risch
Blackburn	Hagerty	Romney
Boozman	Hawley	Rounds
Braun	Hoeben	Rubio
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Budd	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Capito	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cassidy	Lankford	Sinema
Collins	Lee	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lummis	Tester
Cotton	Manchin	Thune
Cramer	Marshall	Tillis
Crapo	McConnell	Tuberville
Cruz	Moran	Vance
Daines	Mullin	Wicker
Ernst	Murkowski	Young
Fischer	Paul	
Graham	Ricketts	

NAYS—46

Baldwin	Heinrich	Reed
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Booker	Hirono	Sanders
Brown	Kaine	Schatz
Cantwell	Kelly	Schumer
Cardin	King	Shaheen
Carper	Klobuchar	Smith
Casey	Lujan	Stabenow
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warnock
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Welch
Feinstein	Murray	Whitehouse
Fetterman	Ossoff	Wyden
Gillibrand	Padilla	
Hassan	Peters	

NOT VOTING—2

Bennet

Warner

The joint resolution (H.J. Res. 45) was passed.

(Mr. PETERS assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHATZ). The majority leader.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY ACT OF
2023—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 84, H.R. 3746.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 84, H.R. 3746, a bill to provide for a responsible increase to the debt ceiling.

Mr. SCHUMER. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as we all know by now, yesterday evening, the House passed a bipartisan bill to lift the debt limit and begin the process of reining in our Nation's unchecked spending habit.

From the time the United States reached the debt ceiling in January, it was clear that a compromise bill would be the only way to avoid a full-blown economic crisis, which is what would happen if we were not to raise the debt ceiling. With a Democrat-led Senate and a Republican-led House and a Democrat in the White House, bipartisanship was and is a necessity.

Now, Republicans, for our part, were clear that any increase in the debt ceiling must come with spending reforms. Otherwise, it would be like your maxing out your credit card and then asking to raise the credit limit so you could borrow more money without having an adult conversation about how you were going to pay the money back. In the real world, that is what would happen. You would have to have that conversation or there would be no increase in your credit card limit. But only in Washington, only in the Nation's Capital would it be even argued that you could raise the debt limit without talking about spending reform.

What has happened is, our Nation's national debt has ballooned now to more than \$31.4 trillion. That is a number—I doubt that anybody here in the Chamber could tell us how many zeros follow that 31.4.

The American people are clearly unhappy with what they see is happening here when it comes to out-of-control spending. A recent poll found that 60 percent of adults think the government spends too much, and they are right. They are frustrated by the unnecessary

and wasteful spending, and they are eager for Congress to do the reasonable, rational thing, which is to begin to get our financial house in order.

That is precisely what Republicans demanded throughout this process—necessary fiscal reforms as part of the debt ceiling negotiation. But instead of stepping up, doing his job, acting responsibly, President Biden took a very different approach. He said: I refuse to negotiate. This is a President of the United States with \$31.4 trillion in debt. He said: I refuse to negotiate. He went on to say that only a clean debt ceiling increase was an option, and he refused to engage in negotiations altogether.

It is helpful to remember that it was in January when we actually hit the debt ceiling. What has happened since then is the Treasury Secretary has engaged in what is euphemistically called extraordinary measures in order to pay the bills as the money comes in through tax revenue. But now she has told us that the X date—which presumably is the default date after extraordinary measures are exhausted—would be June 5. That is Monday. That is Monday.

The President has known since January that this day would come. He has refused to negotiate, and he has led us into this scenario where, unless Congress acts by June 5, we will breach the debt limit and begin to default on paying our bills as a nation.

I don't have to remind anybody that inflation as a result of some of the profligate spending habits of the previous Congress, particularly on our Democratic friends' side—they were happy to spend roughly \$2.3 trillion last year on strictly party-line spending votes. But you put enough gasoline on the fire, and inflation is going to spiral out of control. That is exactly what has happened.

As a consequence, two things have happened. One is that hard-working American families have found their standard of living reduced because they simply can't afford to keep up with the increase in costs as a result of inflation. The second thing that happened is that in order to try to deal with this hidden tax, the Federal Reserve has had to raise interest rates, which has slowed down the economy even more.

Why in the world would President Biden, as a responsible public official, refuse to negotiate when he knows that the anxiety associated with hitting this X date on Monday is causing even more uncertainty, even more trepidation, and even more anxiety over exactly what the future is going to look like? Why would he risk that? President Biden stuck to his "no negotiations, no reforms" position for literally months even though it was painfully obvious that a bipartisan deal was the only way to avoid a further economic crisis.

I want to pause for a moment to commend the Speaker of the House, Speaker MCCARTHY, for his leadership

throughout this process. Without a negotiating partner, he did everything in his power and within the power of the House of Representatives to move this process forward. He stood strong behind the need for fiscal reforms and led the House in passing the Limit, Save, Grow Act. He lured President Biden to the negotiating table, and he successfully moved a compromise bill through the House. But I think the backstory about Speaker MCCARTHY's leadership is that President Biden didn't dream that in a million years, after the difficult race for Speaker that we saw in January, Speaker MCCARTHY would be able to unify Republicans in the House of Representatives and actually pass a bill that raised the debt ceiling. That is what the Limit, Save, Grow Act was. I think President Biden was shocked that he was able to get that done. And I congratulate him for it. It changed the whole dynamics of this negotiation.

But now that the House has acted, the ball is in our court. This Chamber will soon vote on the McCarthy-Biden agreement, and now is the time for the Senate to do its job. Our job is not simply to accept or to rubberstamp what the House passed. That has never been the case. We weren't a party to the agreement; why should we be bound by the strict terms of that agreement?

The Senate has not had a say in the process so far, and it has led to serious frustration on both sides of the aisle. This bill didn't go through regular order; in other words, it didn't go through a committee. Members didn't have the opportunity to weigh in or shape the legislation at that level or even the final text.

Given the time constraints wholly created by President Biden's delay and refusal to negotiate, this rushed process was completely unavoidable. We didn't have to get on the precipice of a default in order to act if President Biden had done his job and responsibly engaged in the negotiations that he finally did engage in at an earlier point, months earlier. So the President dragged his feet for several months, leaving the narrowest possible window to reach a deal and avoid a further crisis.

This is not how this should have played out, but that doesn't mean our hands are tied behind our backs here in the Senate. The Senate is not required, as I said, to rubberstamp the House bill. We have the opportunity to amend this legislation and make it better.

I share the concerns expressed by the ranking member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, the Senator from Maine; the Senator from South Carolina, Senator GRAHAM; Senator SULLIVAN, the Senator from Alaska; and Senator COTTON, I believe, has spoken on that publicly, that the defense number in this agreement is simply inadequate.

It is simply unacceptable to leave it in the hands of Senator SCHUMER, the majority leader, whether or not we actually pass appropriations bills this