

The reason that the Biden administration cut off my State is because my State would not include an abortion hotline in all of our medical information going out to the citizens of my State. That is right. If my State would not promote ways to get abortion to women in my State, then the women of my State can't get access to cancer screenings or contraceptives for low-income women.

Literally, what they are saying is: You either promote abortion in your State, or women in your State can't get access to screenings. That is this administration's extreme policy on abortion.

Listen, I understand we have differences of opinion. I happen to believe every child is valuable. This administration believes some children are disposable and some children are valuable. I just don't find any child disposable in my world. I think they are all valuable. I think they are all important. I think we look in the eyes of those tens of thousands of children that have been born in the past year post Roe, and we look them in the face and we say, I am glad you are here. What are you going to be? What are you going to invent? What are you going to do? What is life going to be like for you?

And like millions of other Americans, they will have a chance to live out life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, because we are right there looking in their eyes. Let's have this conversation. Let's keep this dialogue going.

We are a nation that should talk about hard things in respectful ways. But let's talk about it, because there is lots of families in the days ahead that are counting on us living out our values and respectfully having dialogue where we disagree, because I think kids are worth it. So let's have that dialogue. One year after the Dobbs decision, we are not resolved, but at least we are talking about it again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

LONELINESS

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am on the floor tonight to talk about a topic that rarely, if ever, gets discussed on the Senate floor. I am here to talk about loneliness.

Every single one of us, over the course of our life, has felt lonely, maybe really intensely lonely. I certainly have. It is an awful feeling, right? It creates this pit in your stomach. It creates a consuming melancholy for many. Sometimes intense loneliness can make you physically ill. Often, it makes you really agitated and angry, right? Why is this happening to me?

Now, there are, frankly, a lot of reasons to believe that less Americans today should feel lonely than ever before. More of us live in densely populated parts of the country than ever before. Technology now allows us to con-

nect to friends and family and communities that share interests more easily than ever before at the press of a button.

But evidence from psychology and sociology tells us that the opposite is true. In recent decades, we have seen rising levels of both aloneness, which is defined as having fewer social contacts, and high levels of loneliness, which is defined as feelings of isolation.

We live closer to each other than ever before. We have technologies that allow us to connect to people with more ease than ever before, but people are feeling lonelier. As we look out at a country that seems to be kind of coming apart a little bit at the seams—I mean, people are getting shot at just for ringing the wrong doorbell or pulling into the wrong driveway. Hundreds are dying every day from taking a drug that is designed to deaden their emotions. Thousands of people engaged in violent rebellion right here in the Nation's Capital.

We need to be engaged in this search for the reasons why people are feeling more pessimistic, more frustrated, and angrier than ever before. And so about 8 or 9 months ago, I started talking about what I believed to be one of the most important political issues of our time: loneliness.

Millions of Americans are feeling this way. People report feeling more intense loneliness than ever before in our lifetime. And it is irresponsible for policymakers to just keep ignoring it.

Now, there are a lot of explanations for how we got here, but a few stand out as particularly important for my colleagues to consider.

So it is true that technology does allow us to stay connected to family and friends and find new communities, but on the whole, technology has left many Americans, especially young people, feeling more alone than ever before.

During the height of COVID-19, we learned the hard way that digital communication cannot replace the value of in-person experience. For example, studies show that face-to-face interactions create faster connections to humans and build stronger, more enduring relationships than anything that you can create online.

Of course, staying in touch electronically is better than losing touch altogether, but when Facebook likes and Instagram comments replace in-person experiences, it actually can drive up feelings of loneliness.

Staring at your screen for 6 hours a day, no matter how many people you are looking at, it can be a very lonely experience.

And it doesn't stop there, because there are millions of users with developing minds—children—who spend hours staring at their screens, scrolling through an endless stream of pictures and videos that have been carefully curated to create an illusion of perfection, leaving young people feeling inadequate or wanting.

Constant comparison breeds—in young people especially but in all of us—and can result in more anxiety than fulfillment. Kids are feeling really lousy today, and it is not just because they are spending tons of time on their screens instead of engaging in real in-person experiences. It is also because the content that they are watching is dangerous and corrosive and making them feel more alone in the world because of those feelings of envy.

Now, the second really important factor contributing to this epidemic of loneliness in America is the erosion of local communities. Now, connection sometimes happens randomly; but, mostly, it is facilitated through local institutions: churches, sports teams, civic clubs, labor unions, business organizations. We derive personal meaning as well from those institutions, from the communities that we create or join. We get connection, but we also get meaning.

Those institutions help us construct an identity, a sense of purpose. It connects us to something bigger than ourselves. But in 2023, you would be hard-pressed to find a community with the kind of thriving local institutions of decades ago.

Globalization has erased thousands of healthy, unique downtowns, where people often met each other at local businesses. And that outsourcing of commerce online has also diminished local cultures that facilitate connection, identity, and meaning. Growing up, my identity was really strongly connected to the town that I lived in, and there was no shortage of ways that I could easily connect with the people I lived with.

Back then, we had thriving local newspapers where I could learn really easily about the people in my town, which made it easier to create that connection.

Those local newspapers are drying up by the day. We all get our news from national sources. It was my local grocer who used to slip me a free slice of American cheese when I would visit on the weekend with my grandparents that made me feel like I belonged to a community, that I wasn't alone. But now the local grocer is gone, driven out of business by superstores or food-delivery drivers.

But even if you still had these local institutions to be a part of, who has time any longer? A few decades ago, one job could easily provide a family with a comfortable middle-class life. Today, adults are forced to maintain two or three jobs to match that same income, or work 50 or 60 or 70 hours a week. There is no time any longer for millions of Americans to go to church, to be part of a civic club, or just hang out with your friends or your neighbors or your family.

And so what are you seeing? Participation in youth sports is plummeting. That is in part because overextended parents are just too busy these days to shuttle their kids to games or practices, or they just can't afford the fees

or equipment costs. Yes, kids are more interested in online gaming and their screens, but it is also stressed-out parents who just don't have time to participate in all those extracurricular activities with their kids but also don't have time to join the kind of institutions that used to give them value back when 40 hours a week was enough.

And so here is maybe the most important question: Why should we care? What are the public policy implications of loneliness? Well, first, there are health consequences to loneliness. American suicide rates are rising at an alarming rate, most significantly amongst two key populations: teenagers and rural men, who are both disproportionately affected by the changing landscape of American culture and economics.

Researchers at NYU found a direct correlation between teenage girls' use of Instagram and the corresponding spike in teenage girls' self-harm rates; and teenage rates of sadness are higher than ever.

For rural white men—one of my favorites—Nobel prize-winning economist Angus Deaton, he argues that as the white male dominated “blue-collar aristocracy” of 50 to 100 years ago has vanished, with the loss of social and economic status that went with it, those men are struggling. And this feeling of isolation, specifically amongst that population, is rising to epidemic levels as well, with a record number of white men who are struggling in this new world, committing acts of self-harm.

Surgeon General Vivek Murthy does a great job of connecting the dots between widespread loneliness and individual health. It is not just suicide. Last month, he released a detailed advisory with shocking statistics: Social isolation is associated with a 29-percent increase in the risk of heart disease and a 32-percent increase in the risk of stroke. Chronic loneliness can increase the risk of developing dementia in older people by 50 percent. Do we think it is a coincidence that life expectancy rates in this country are falling at the same time that loneliness is spiking?

The second reason that we should care about this epidemic as policymakers is because this growing isolation of Americans is helping to fuel a growing culture of resentment and anger.

I mentioned that young woman who was shot because she pulled up to the wrong driveway; but we see this edginess all over in our culture today. People are strung out. Violence is more common as a means to settle disputes, and fringe groups and conspiracy theories are more popular than ever.

I think loneliness is a big part of the reason why all this is happening. I mentioned that loneliness is often accompanied by a sense of anger. Why do I feel like this? Who is to blame? This anger, coupled with this diminishing availability of positive identities like

family, place, or institution, makes negative identities built on hatred and distrust all the more attractive.

And so the newly isolated, the lonely, become targets for demagogues who offer up scapegoats to blame for the decay of these traditional sources of meaning and identity.

In 2017, America was shocked when a huge White Supremacists rally in Charlottesville drew thousands, but this shouldn't have been a surprise. Loneliness drives people to dark, dangerous places. And those young White men carrying tiki torches are only the tip of a giant iceberg of isolated, angry Americans whose search for meaning might lead them to a seething anti-Semitic or racist mob.

Now, the picture I am painting—I get it—is pretty grim, but I am here to tell you, there are reasons to hope. One of the reasons why I really believe Congress can get something done attacking isolation and loneliness and building more social connections is because there is a growing consensus across the aisle about this set of problems that we are dealing with and the solutions, which this problem set may be a little less political than other problems we face in this body.

I think Congress is coming to acknowledge that the consequences of rapidly advancing technology are not value-neutral. We have seen how social media has deepened polarization and addicted a generation of kids to their screens, and in the past few months, we have been involved in a new conversation about generative AI and machine learning and how it has the potential to displace millions of jobs and a whole bunch of basic human functions.

Most Republicans and Democrats agree that we made a big mistake by sitting on the sidelines during the early days of the internet and the development most recently of social media.

The good news is that Republicans and Democrats are working together on this problem. There are a few good pieces of legislation that could start to hold social media companies accountable who are driving kids into lives of increasing loneliness and isolation.

Senators COTTON, SCHATZ, BRITT, and I have proposed a bill to set a minimum age of 13 to use social media, to require parental consent. It also prohibits social media companies from using these highly personalized algorithms to drive dangerous, isolationist-inducing content to kids.

On the issue of AI, Senator SCHUMER has convened a bipartisan group that is beginning its work as well, and I am glad to be a part of it.

A second starting point that I really think really think has bipartisan potential would be to advance policies specifically aimed at restoring the health of our local communities and local institutions.

In Western Connecticut, in my old congressional district, we have got the “Brass City,” the “Silver City,” the

“Hardware City,” the “Hat City.” For a long time in this country, identity, meaning, and connection were created because we really were proud of the things we made, of the jobs that existed. But the theory of economic neoliberalism sent most of those jobs overseas and assumed that better jobs would replace them. That is not what happened.

So I really believe that industrial policy is part of the solution to decreasing isolation and loneliness. Why? Because so many people get meaning and identity from the things that we make and used to make, from jobs that have meaning and good wages and benefits and pensions attached to them. That is why the CHIPS and Science Act paved the way for a new industrial policy to get the Republicans and Democrats to come together and work on creating more meaning in work which I think leads to isolation and loneliness.

But, as I said before, that only works if a full-time job provides a living wage and you have enough time in the evenings and on the weekends to be able to engage with your friends and your family and your community.

So I am also hopeful that we can make progress across the aisle driving up the minimum wage and incentivizing jobs to pay real living wages.

This week, a conservative group called American Compass released a report that was underlaid by a really scathing critique of modern capitalism. The conference was attended by a bunch of our Republican colleagues here. The report called for policymakers to remake capitalism so that our economic system works to build strong families, healthy individuals, and connected communities instead of just viewing families and individuals as mere pawns of the global market, the grease that makes the wheels of profit move. This is a really interesting development. Serious people on the right are starting to rethink the nature of capitalism to make sure that our economy works for families and individuals to make us more connected and less lonely. So there is real possibility that both parties, the right and the left, can come together to address this crisis of American isolation.

America's epidemic of loneliness is far from terminal. Our retreat into ourselves is a product of economic, cultural, and political choices we have made, but it is not too late to chart a new path. I get it. This is a Congress that has a hard time solving much more straightforward problems, so tackling a metaphysical crisis like loneliness might feel like a Herculean task. So, right now, I would argue that we just need a starting point, an organizing point for some of these discussions.

So I am working on legislation that would just start by establishing a national strategy, a national conversation around loneliness and how to promote connectedness. Every Agency

should have a role to play in this crisis. So I would argue that we just need to start with a dedicated office to coordinate a governmentwide strategy to tackle loneliness and strengthen communities.

I also think we should have guidelines and best practices for public entities to engage in trying to connect people. We have guidelines for nutrition and physical activity and sleep. We should have these guidelines for social connection.

Finally, we can't really address this crisis adequately if we don't understand it. So my legislation would also include some small amounts of funding to support research on the social and health impacts of widespread loneliness.

I look forward to talking to my colleagues about this legislation. It doesn't solve the problem, but I think it is time that we start organizing our work and our thoughts around what is, in many ways, a foundational problem, which explains a lot of the things that people are feeling that drives political instability, bad health outcomes, and just general unhappiness in this country.

Loneliness is one of the few issues that defies traditional political boundaries, cuts across almost every demographic, from teenage girls living in cities, to White men living out in rural areas, blue States to red States, unaffordable cities to left-behind manufacturing towns.

There is a ton of room for us to come together to combat this growing epidemic of loneliness, and I hope that my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are eager to be part of this solution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HASSAN). The Senator from Colorado.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Mr. BENNET. Madam President, I am sorry I didn't have the chance to say thank you to our colleague from Connecticut for his speech tonight about loneliness in the United States. I was grateful that he gave it and grateful that he is in the Senate and grateful to know that another parent of young kids has the perspective that he has shared tonight because I think it is so important. And strangely enough, I am here to talk about something similar tonight.

First, Madam President, I will put it away because it is not supposed to be on the floor, but I wanted to come here tonight to talk a little bit about this smartphone and the world of social media, the world of machine learning algorithms and generative AI that has now been put at our fingertips.

The rise of smartphones and social media is one of the most rapid, profound, and, I would argue, poorly understood transformations in American life in our entire history.

If you had asked me when I was the age of the pages who are here, when I was growing up, and you had said to me: Someday, Michael, there is going

to be a device—well, here is the device—there is going to be a device that looks like this; it doesn't even have a wire next to it, that would have been astonishing in and of itself. How can an electronic device not have a wire? But it does not have a wire. Not only does it not have a wire, but you can FaceTime anybody on Earth the way Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock FaceTimed each other.

The Presiding Officer knows what I am talking about. These folks may not know who Captain Kirk was or who Mr. Spock was. But the idea that you could reach somebody and communicate with them on video, on a telephone, or a device that had no wires, that alone would have been shocking.

If you had said: Well, let me tell you something else about that device, I would say: OK. What else can you tell me about that device?

And you said: Well, you can buy any book that has ever been written by humans, basically, on that device. And if you want it, you can make a choice. You can have it digitally, and it will just download immediately on your device, or you can order it, and it can be at your house by tonight, if you would rather have a print version of the book rather than getting it digitally. And I will tell you something else, Michael, it will translate any language that you care to hear.

I was, today, with the CEO of Google who was in my office talking about how one of their projects now is to help recover and sustain lost languages or languages we are in danger of losing in this country and around the world, which I think is a worthy project. We definitely, in my State, are at risk of losing Native American languages that really are at risk.

But in any case, if you said to me: You can translate any language or you can translate yourself into any language, and somebody would ask: What do you think that device is worth? In 1983 or 1987, when I was graduating from high school or college, I think I probably would have said that is probably—I can't imagine what it is worth—millions of dollars. Millions of dollars. To have every book that has ever been published that is in every library in the world? Millions of dollars, to be able to translate every language that you can translate? Millions of dollars.

And if you told me that it actually only cost a few hundred dollars, which it does, and that everybody on planet Earth would have one, which is almost in many ways the case, I would have asked what you were smoking. But it is true. It is true. And that is the world we have inhabited for almost 20 years. It is not new: the digital age, the information age, the age of ubiquitous smartphones, social media, and a handful of digital platforms that control them.

And for all of the extraordinary convenience and extraordinary productivity and entertainment that these

technologies have allowed, as a country, we still haven't come to grips with the profound cost to our economy, to our society, and to our democracy, and that is before we even consider AI.

This is what everybody around here is talking about, what some would call the most consequential technology for humanity since the invention of fire. But unlike fire, this technology can improve itself, and it has the potential to move faster and transform more than any innovation in our history, for better or for worse.

Even in its early days, generative AI has already demonstrated the power to write the code to animate and even compose in ways that would have been absolutely unimaginable 20 years ago or 10 years ago, to say nothing of when we were in school.

It is easy to forget how different the world was just 20 years ago. Twenty years ago, General Motors topped the Fortune 500 list. Apple was 285, and Amazon didn't even make the cut. Twitter was still an idea somewhere in the recesses of Jack Dorsey's head. Mark Zuckerberg was barely old enough to vote, even though he likely already acquired the undeveloped view of the First Amendment that he seems to hold to this day. No one on this planet had ever heard of Gmail or TikTok or ChatGPT. That was only 20 years ago, but it might as well have been 200 years ago.

Today, Americans spend over 2 hours a day on social media, more time socializing online than in person. The average TikTok user in our country spends 90 minutes a day on the app—more than 3 weeks a year.

Facebook now hosts 2.7 billion friends—a half a billion more souls than Christianity.

Twitter has fewer followers, but they include every single politician—probably almost every single person in this Chamber—every journalist, every TV producer in America, withering our political debate to 280-character effervescent posts.

In just two decades, a few companies—less than a handful, really—have transformed much of humanity's daily life: how we amuse ourselves, how we discover, how we learn, how we shop, how we connect with friends and family and elected representatives, how we pay attention, how we glimpse our shared reality. This transformation is a staggering testament to American innovation.

And we can all think of a dozen ways that platforms have improved our lives. I, for one, have been entirely relieved of the stress of sitting in rush-hour traffic, wondering if there is a better route. I am now confident that Waze is guiding me like my own personal North Star, and that has made an enormous difference to my sense of well-being.

But this dramatic shift from our analog to our digital human existence has never been guided and has never been informed by the public interest. It has