

It is always great to get around the State. It is one of the great joys of being in office—just visiting with people, real people, listening to what their concerns are. I had a chance to do that. I promised them I would always come and fight for them. Visiting for that month in particular—as we always do but certainly that amount, that block of time—only inspires me to fight even harder.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

BIDENOMICS

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, 22 years ago, Apple released the first desktop version of its macOS operating system. The first Harry Potter movie and the first Lord of the Rings movie both came out. Alicia Keys and Destiny's Child were topping the charts, and Bill Clinton left office.

Twenty-two years ago was also the last time that mortgage rates were as high as they are now. Yes, they are higher now than they were during the 2008 financial crisis. Mortgage rates were the lowest in American history in January of 2021. Then Joe Biden became President. Over the past 2½ years, mortgage rates have almost tripled. In the meantime, inflation rates are still climbing higher.

This past month, as I traveled Nebraska during the Senate's State work period, I visited with dozens and dozens of middle-class Americans. It is truly the best part of my job—meeting with small business owners, ag producers, schoolteachers, nurses, students, and employees all across my home State, but this year it was so frustrating to hear about the economic struggles that Nebraskans are facing.

Middle-class Nebraskans are scraping by financially, and what is ironic is that they are doing it on the watch of a President who calls himself "Middle-Class Joe." President Biden's line recently has been, "When the middle class does well, everyone does well."

You know, I agree with him. I would just add that, right now, everyone is not doing well. That is especially true for the middle class, and it is because this administration's ill-advised policies keep pumping air into an economy that is already bloated. The so-called Bidenomics agenda is poison, described as a "cure-all" for middle-class Americans. That is not an exaggeration. Last month, I saw Bidenomics up close in Nebraska so let me tell you how it is going.

One Saturday this August, I visited a small town in Western Nebraska. That afternoon, a small business owner told me that his electricity bills had shot up over the past couple of years both for his home and for his business. Electricity, groceries, gas—you name it—these essentials are tough to afford, if not impossible to afford, for the average middle-class American. That is Bidenomics in Nebraska.

Business owners and families alike shared that they can hardly pay in-

creasingly high rents and mortgage rates. In fact, all year, an increasing number of middle-class Nebraskans has resorted to asking the Salvation Army for money so that they can pay their utilities. That is Bidenomics in Nebraska.

As I traveled the State, the issue of childcare affordability came up over and over and over again. Childcare costs have skyrocketed, and dads and moms are at a loss as to how to afford these rising rates. That is Bidenomics in Nebraska.

The Bidenomics agenda has made many promises, but I haven't seen the administration keep a single one. Remember the President's American Families Plan? Almost 2½ years ago, the President promised that low- and middle-income families would spend no more than 7 percent of their income on childcare.

In leading up to the fourth year of Biden's Presidency, here is what family life looks like: Nebraska's families are already struggling due to inflation. They have seen price increases on bills, groceries, and almost everything else. In many cases, both parents need to work so they can make enough so that they can pay off debt or afford those high mortgage rates. When childcare costs are through the roof, it is impossible for both parents to work. According to the Economic Policy Institute, childcare costs rose 24.4 percent more per year than the average rent and 53.5 percent more than instate college tuition—53.5 percent per year. That is Bidenomics in Nebraska.

From the American Families Plan to the Inflation Reduction Act, this administration's efforts to grow our economy from the middle class out have totally failed.

My message to the President is this: When the middle class does badly, everyone does badly.

We need to undo the harmful, excessive regulations that are making middle-class Americans suffer. We need to put the priority on reducing costs for everyday Americans. We need to unleash American energy to lower our gas prices. We need to support an economic plan that will lower inflation, and we need to pull the plug on wasteful policies that don't help anyone.

So stop with the slogans, Mr. President, and spend more time listening to real Americans' concerns.

Bidenomics is not working in Nebraska, and let's be honest, it is not working in the other 49 States either. This administration needs to hear this. It is 2½ years past time to make a change.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

ENERGY

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the high cost of energy and the high cost of gasoline prices that are the direct result of the Biden administration's harmful energy policies.

As Americans hit the road over the recent holiday weekend, many noticed something that has become all too familiar under the Biden administration, and that is continued high prices at the gas pump. The average cost of a gallon of gas was about \$2.40 on January 20, 2021. Today, consumers are paying at the pump about \$3.80 a gallon for gasoline, on average. That is 60 percent higher than when President Biden took office. That hits every one of them right in the pocketbook, particularly those who can afford it the least.

Now, gasoline is like any commodity, wherein prices are high because demand exceeds supply. President Biden's energy policy is the problem. There can be no doubt about that. The main problem is that President Biden's Green New Deal policies are stifling domestic energy production—that is the main problem—but President Biden has literally taken action to put America behind the barrel. It is not just that he is restricting domestic supply; he has also increased our dependence on foreign oil, and our adversaries know it. Let me tell you what I mean.

Since the Biden administration started, it has released 260 million barrels from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, bringing our Reserve to its lowest level since 1983. Approximately, 350 million barrels remain in the Reserve—350 million barrels. That is down from the all-time high of more than 700 million barrels. So our Reserve, our Strategic Petroleum Reserve, is at less than half of its capacity.

You might have noticed that on Tuesday, September 5, Saudi Arabia and Russia extended a 1.3-million-barrel-a-day cut through December. So they extended a reduction through the end of the year. Saudi Arabia is voluntarily cutting 1 million barrels per day of production while Russia is reducing 300,000 barrels per day of exports. Following that announcement, the price of Brent crude rose to over \$90 a barrel, and the price of WTI—West Texas Intermediate—crude rose to almost \$87 a barrel. Today, they are up again.

Basically, President Biden has weakened our ability to respond just when we need to. As I say, our adversaries are well aware of it. That is why they are reducing supply—to push the price up.

The real problem is that he has put handcuffs on our producers and is restricting supply here at home, which is the real solution. To add insult to injury, he has also depleted the Reserve because he was trying to keep prices down earlier. Our adversaries know it, and now they are taking advantage of it. Unbelievable. Unbelievable.

Every successful economy depends on having access to low-cost, dependable sources of energy, and our vast supply of Federal oil, gas, and coal resources is one of our Nation's most strategic assets. Yet, instead of harnessing our abundant, taxpayer-owned energy reserves, the Biden administration is taking every imaginable step to curtail new production.

The Interior Department is failing to hold quarterly lease sales onshore and is reducing available acreage both onshore and offshore for leasing. Just today, it was reported that the Biden administration is canceling a congressionally mandated lease sale in Alaska that was awarded in 2021.

Alongside restricting lands available for leasing, the Biden administration is imposing new costs and burdens on Federal energy leases. Maximizing access to new leasing today is directly tied to growing production and supply not only for today but for the long term. Otherwise, production will continue to fail to meet demand, and that means higher prices for American consumers.

Also, our Nation's refining capacity has fallen from 19 million barrels per day in 2020 to about 18 million barrels a day now. We have not built a new refinery in the United States since 1977, and the Biden administration's regulatory onslaught and rush to electric vehicle mandates only drives those gas prices higher.

Instead of empowering more U.S. energy production and encouraging much needed new investment, President Biden drained our strategic petroleum reserve to its lowest level in 40 years, while begging countries like Venezuela and Saudi Arabia to produce more. And as I just said, Russia and OPEC know it, and they are restricting their production to push oil prices higher.

It makes no sense to increase our reliance on Russia and OPEC for energy. These are foreign producers that have little or no regard for environmental stewardship. So think about it, The Biden administration is doing this in the name of environmental stewardship? So they want oil produced in a way that is not environmentally friendly rather than the best environmental standards, which we have here in the United States?

Again, it defies common sense, and it hurts every American consumer. The United States is a global energy powerhouse, and it is time we act like one. Simply put, increasing U.S. energy production and refining capacity is the ultimate solution to bringing more supply, thereby lowering prices at the pump and providing hard-working families and businesses the relief from high energy prices they need and they deserve. That is why President Biden needs to take the handcuffs off and unleash the full potential of America's vast energy reserves.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

FENTANYL

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, I recall the first time I sat down with the late great Senator Bob Dole after I had been elected to Congress. And the purpose of that meeting was to get to know the Senator, but I had a big issue I was getting ready to vote on, and I wanted to get his advice. As I pre-

sented to him the legislation I was going to be voting on the next day, he stopped and looked at me, and he said: Roger, what you need to do is just go back to Kansas and listen to the people of Kansas. They will tell you the answer to that question.

So this August was no different than any break I have had. Like many of my colleagues, we went back to our home States. I went from Wathena to Wichita, from small towns to big cities, from the inner city to rural America; and we listened. We sat down with unions, small businesses, big businesses, folks from financial services, and farmers and ranchers. We sat down with leaders from public schools and private schools.

We had roundtables. We did multiple roundtables on childcare, homelessness. We sat down with multiple minority business owners, and we talked about the challenges they had, specifically about access to capital. We did roundtables on nutrition and healthcare.

In Abilene, KS, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Small Business Administration, founded by our 34th President of the United States, Kansas' own Dwight David Eisenhower; we participated in a DHS human trafficking event and in history. I thought I had seen all the history from Kansas, but we found two more locations that were underground railroads where they particularly housed freedom seekers—one in the Quindaro Ruins of Kansas City, KS, and the John Brown cabin in Osawatomie.

But of all the things we did that I think is important was our fentanyl awareness campaign: One Pill Can Kill.

I am often asked about going from being a physician to a Senator and what is the difference. And I would describe that as a physician, I could impact maybe 30, 40, 50 people in one day; but as a U.S. Senator, I have the opportunity to impact thousands of people and to save lives. In this case, that is exactly what the goal of this One Pill Can Kill campaign was.

We thought that as kids return to school would be an ideal time to get out that message that, indeed, one pill—one fake pill laced with fentanyl—can kill. Our entire Kansas delegation participated, and I am grateful for their support. We had over 100 Kansas organizations actively participate as well, reaching out to their own networks. From law enforcement, the KBI was outstanding, the sheriffs; our community health centers; colleges; high schools; health departments—anyone we could get to, to get that message out that one pill can kill.

Every day, our staff did an incredible job of arming every one of the organizations with information to help get that word out. It resulted in thousands of social media posts across the State, and I am grateful for the local media—the newspapers, the radios, the television stations—that resulted in hundreds of articles that, indeed, one pill can kill.

And I think the story is easy to tell, and that is what we tried to do was just tell the story of fentanyl, how the cartel is alive and well across the State of Kansas; that they are lacing Xanax, Adderall, and Percocet with fentanyl, and even marijuana they are lacing with it; that this is now the No. 1 killer of young adults.

I am sad to say that most every day, we lose a Kansan to fentanyl poisoning. In fact, we are using Narcan 10, 15, 20 times a day. I talked to a fireman in Kansas City who said every day they are making runs because of fentanyl.

And again, we just wanted to share the story of where fentanyl is being sold, how its sold, its deceptiveness, and the efforts required to combat it.

I will just close with this: It is easier to get a fentanyl tablet and cheaper to get a fentanyl tablet delivered to your home than it is to order a piece of pizza. For a dollar a pill, you can now get fentanyl delivered to your home. And all it takes is just one of those pills to kill.

For the sake of our children, I pray that we can secure our borders, that we would stop the influx of fentanyl into Kansas and the rest of this country. And in doing so, we can save literally hundreds, if not thousands, of lives. Our weeklong campaign pushed us closer to that goal.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FEDERAL AGENCIES

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, while I was home in Iowa this past month, I wrapped up my annual River to River tour, where I hear directly from Iowans in all 99 counties every single year.

Our government is designed to be of the people, by the people, and for the people; and that is why I am committed to hearing from Iowans in every corner of our State and every county. It is my job to bring their voices loud and clear to Washington, where I have the honor and privilege of representing them in this great body.

Now that the Senate is back in session, we have lots of unfinished business that impacts Iowans' lives, from funding the government to renewing the farm bill. It is here in the Nation's Capital that we gather to complete this work on behalf of our fellow Americans.

While the Senate is once again bustling with activity, I see we even have a new class of Senate pages representing us, and they are here for duty.

You have reported for duty, right?

Welcome to all of our new pages. Thank you for your service as well.

And the halls of Washington's bureaucracies as we look about this city, they remain largely empty and hollow; and that, folks, is a top issue for Iowa taxpayers and folks across the country.

Thousands of calls to the Department of Veterans Affairs from veterans seeking mental health services are going unanswered. Desperate travelers are