

the debt ceiling now is paying for Donald Trump's priorities voted for by Congress and the Republicans. It is the responsible thing to do.

Even in their policies, such as tax breaks for the wealthiest people in the country, the fact is it was enacted into law, and we have a responsibility, in preserving the good faith and credit of the United States, to extend the debt limit even for those policies which I personally disagree with. The Republicans moved to raise the debt ceiling three times during the Trump administration, and the Democrats supported them every time.

We don't want to turn America into a deadbeat nation. Defaulting on our national debt for the first time in history, as the MAGA Republicans are threatening in the House, would throw millions of Americans out of work. According to a think tank, the Third Way, a worker with a 401(k) retirement account could lose \$20,000 because of interest rates, and a new 30-year mortgage would cost an additional \$130,000. How many people would be willing to buy a new home or a new car facing those circumstances? Borrowing would become harder and more expensive, and the national debt would increase by \$850 million just from our failure to extend the debt limit.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "We cannot escape history," warning Congress and a nation torn apart by a civil war. Thank God we are not facing anything like that today, but we are facing deep divisions and continued assaults on our democracy.

So as we begin this new Congress, we need to ask ourselves: What do we want history to say about this Senate during the next 2 years? Will we be remembered for chaos or consensus? Will we work to heal the divisions in our Nation or deepen them? Will we solve the problems that really matter to the American people or invent problems and stoke them for political advantage?

My Democratic colleagues and I are hopeful that there will be a positive answer to those questions, that we can negotiate and work together in good faith for a better America.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Alabama.

#### CORONAVIRUS

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Madam President, it is great to be back with my Senate colleagues this week. It has been a while. But we need to get a lot done in this year's new Congress.

As a new Congress is getting underway, our country faces many problems, many problems that we need to address. However, as we look ahead to what we can accomplish this Congress, we also need to look back and learn from the past. Having the courage to recognize and address problems prevents us from making problems and continuing the same thing in the future.

It is high time we take a look back at the devastating impacts of some of

the Federal and State government policies in response to COVID-19 and the pandemic. Most importantly, we have to focus on education. We have to look at the toll the lockdowns have taken on our country's youngest citizens.

Unfortunately, like many issues in DC, the COVID crisis was weaponized for some political gain. The government misused emergency measures to grow its control over Americans' daily lives. Hopefully, those days are over.

This time 3 years ago, COVID was making its way around our country, through the States and through the communities. Of course, in the early days, we knew very little about the virus and how to respond to it, so leaders in both parties, leaders across our States and our communities, called for a pause in daily activities to get control of the spread of COVID-19. But what we didn't know then was how long that pause would last, not just in some areas but all over our country. And we certainly didn't know that our response could end up being worse—the response that we had being worse than the actual COVID that was running across our country.

We are just now starting to understand the impact of COVID-related lockdowns. They weren't just extreme, they were deadly in some areas.

Research led by a professor at the University of Chicago exposed the deadly impact of lockdowns by analyzing the excess death rate in our country during the use of these lockdowns. The "excess rate" is a term used to describe the number of deaths above historical norms—or how many more Americans died than we would typically expect to pass away during any given year. So those were balanced up and looked at from the years of COVID to the years past.

According to the data from the CDC, the number of non-COVID excess deaths reached almost 100,000 people in 2020 and in 2021. The hundreds of thousands of non-COVID excess deaths during the pandemic can be mainly attributed to shocking increases in accidents, overdoses, and death from alcoholism and homicide. Those causes disproportionately impacted minorities and low-income Americans—the same groups lockdowns were often billed and made to protect.

The number of deaths from hypertension and heart disease and diabetes also skyrocketed during the pandemic. This was especially true for America's young people. In total, excess deaths among young adults throughout the pandemic were 27 percent higher than they should be, according to historical records of years past.

It does not take a scientist to draw the connection between lockdowns and all the excess deaths that we have had the last 3 years. Not only were Americans kept out of gyms, parks, churches, social settings, and family gatherings, they were forced to skip routine doctor visits, surgeries, and in-person medical treatments out of fear. And fear was

the main weapon used against the American people. As a result, mental and physical health plummeted.

While lockdowns across the country slowly ended, the deadly repercussions did not. For example, through the middle of last year, overdose deaths per year outnumbered the total number of military deaths in the past 60 years.

The truth is, the physical and mental health consequences of overreaching lockdowns will be measured for years and years to come.

Locking Americans out of school, work, church, and social contact had disastrous impacts on our economy, our education system, and our society as a whole.

We all saw businesses across the country go under as customers were kept away and the daily hum of our economy was silenced.

As kids were forced into virtual schooling, an entire generation of Americans lost months and even years of valuable educational opportunities. Research conducted by the global consulting firm McKinsey found that COVID-related school disruption left students 5 months behind in math and 4 months behind in reading. Students who were already underserved were hit even harder by school closures. High schoolers were left more likely to drop out and less likely to pursue further education after the lockdowns. And more than 35 percent of American parents were left "very or extremely concerned about their children's mental health."

Today, our schools are facing a shortage of teachers, months of instruction still missing, and a mental health and behavioral crisis among our country's students. It is a pandemic.

As someone who spent decades myself as an educator and a coach, who fostered the potential of young adults, I am committed to ensuring we never inflict the damage on our school-age kids again, no matter what.

I bring up these sobering facts on health and education to call on this body to join me in this commitment in this Congress to do away with what we just did. We have to evaluate it. We cannot keep going forward this way.

This is especially important as some influential people in our government, media, and public health circles continue today to call for measures that disrupt our society in ways we know have terrible consequences.

The Biden administration is hellbent on keeping the COVID-19 public health emergency that is still in place. We still have it today.

Just last week, President Biden extended the emergency declaration because of the extra power it gives to the Federal Government, and he does that for another 90 days.

Attorneys for the Federal Government were in court asking an unelected judge to reinstate the national mask mandate for air travel just in the last few weeks.

Keep in mind, this body, in a bipartisan manner, voted to end the emergency declaration just this last year—

something we should do again in this Congress.

But even though the President himself has deemed the pandemic over, bureaucrats are obsessed with keeping this charade going.

Enough is enough. We must be the barrier between the American people and tyranny because tyrannical orders, like the COVID lockdowns, are dangerous to every citizen in this country.

As we get to work this Congress, I hope all my colleagues will join me in recognizing the tough realities I have just laid out. We cannot continue to do this, and we can't do it again. We have to commit to defending freedom in every circumstance. We have to learn from our past mistakes.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, after a busy and productive time at home for several weeks, I am glad to be back in the Senate as we kick off the new year and a new Congress. After 2 years of Democrats controlling both Chambers, the House and Senate, the American people voted for a change in the midterm election. Voters sent a Republican majority to the House and opted for a divided government.

With a Republican House, Democrats, of course, will no longer be able to abuse the budget reconciliation process to circumvent the normal legislative process, which means the end to partisan spending bills. They will have no choice but to work for common ground and to move legislation through what we call regular order around here, which means by the rules.

While there is a lot we need to do in the coming months, one of our top priorities must be the humanitarian and security crisis at the southern border. This crisis has been raging since President Biden took office 2 years ago. Day after day, month after month, migrants have crossed the border in unprecedented numbers.

Over the years, we have seen migration surges at different times, but nothing like this. The scale and the immensity of this crisis are unprecedented.

Last month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection encountered more than 250,000 migrants at the southern border. That is the back door to my State, the State of Texas. A quarter of a million people in a single month—that is a new record and a shocking number.

To put that in perspective, Customs and Border Protection encountered more migrants in November and December last year than it did in all of 2017—more in 2 months, the last 2

months of last year, than it did in the entire year of 2017.

Those figures tell you a lot, but no words can accurately capture just how complex and challenging the situation at the border truly is. To understand what is happening on the ground, you need to show up. You need to see it firsthand, and you need to listen and learn from the experts and the people who are dealing with this day in and day out.

I have traveled to the border many, many times over the last few years, as this crisis has gotten worse. I have spoken with the law enforcement officials who have taken an oath to uphold and enforce our laws, the nonprofits—groups like Catholic Charities, which provide humanitarian services—local officials, mayors, and county judges, who are responsible to their own taxpayers for providing services that are overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of people coming across the border.

Then there are private landowners who find that their fences are knocked down, their properties are trashed, and that people trespass upon it at will.

Then there are the small business owners that depend on the foot traffic that frequently comes back and forth across the border and countless others who are impacted by the current border crisis.

Of course, these are exactly the kinds of people you might want to talk to if you actually had an interest in learning more about what the problem is and fashioning some kind of solution.

I was happy to introduce these experts to a bipartisan group of my Senate colleagues a couple of weeks ago. Both of us representing border States, Senator SINEMA, the Senator from Arizona, and I have had what you might call an exchange program between our two States.

A couple of years ago I visited Tucson, AZ, and Senator SINEMA, in turn, visited the Rio Grande Valley for a series of briefings. The first thing that jumps out at you is that the border is big—2000 miles. It covers a lot of territory, and it varies a lot, depending on whether you visit urban areas like El Paso or rural areas like Yuma, AZ.

That is why, while I am happy that President Biden finally went to the border in El Paso, briefly, I know he could not have gotten a full awareness of the challenges that the current crisis, as a result of his open border policies, presents.

Nevertheless, seeing two very different border crossings was valuable to both Senator SINEMA and myself, and we decided it was time to share that information with our colleagues. So we invited several of them to join us. In total, there were eight of us—eight Senators on the trip. On the Republican side, we had Senators TILLIS, LANKFORD, MORAN, and myself. On the Democratic side, we had Senators KELLY, MURPHY, and COONS.

Actually, now that Senator SINEMA has declared herself as an Independent,

she said that this was not a bipartisan trip but a tripartisan trip.

We spent a day in El Paso, speaking with law enforcement and local stakeholders. In recent months, the city of El Paso has been ground zero and overwhelmed by the influx of migrants. It doesn't have the capacity—no border community does—to care for the tens of thousands of people coming across the border daily or the infrastructure to house them or to transport them safely to other locations.

Fortunately, at least in the near term—and it tends to go in waves, up and down—most recently, the pace in El Paso has slowed down, but some of the sidewalks downtown are still lined with makeshift tents and sleeping bags—migrants camping out in the city, nowhere to go, waiting for their next meal and waiting for some place warm to be able to sleep.

We heard about the tremendous burden this crisis has placed on law enforcement at all levels. You can imagine it. They are already understaffed, and now they are overwhelmed.

We heard about the growing strain on the nongovernmental organizations and the cities, as they try to mitigate this crisis.

Again, this is a crisis of the President's own making, as a result of his open border policies and the failure to enforce our immigration laws.

We heard from business leaders who depend on customers coming to their business, as well as other local stakeholders, about the larger impact this crisis has had on the El Paso community and the southwest border region, especially the effect it has had on legitimate trade and travel, which are vital to the region's economy.

I don't know if most nonborder-State Senators understand it or not, but we have the largest land port in America in Laredo, TX. They have somewhere between 14 to 16,000 trucks a day come across the border for legitimate trade and commerce. Obviously, that legitimate trade and commerce that creates a lot of jobs all across America are impeded by this vast influx of humanity that are coming currently as a result of the nonenforcement policies of the administration.

The day after we visited El Paso, we traveled to Yuma, AZ. And, if you are looking at a map of Arizona, it is in the southwest portion of Arizona, just right next to California, at the very southern-southwest tip of Arizona.

Yuma, AZ, is an agricultural community, by and large—a small town, not a lot of infrastructure, not a lot of hospitals, schools, or other places for migrants to be taken care of when they come to the border. So it is no surprise that the Border Patrol there in Yuma, AZ, a little small town on the southwestern border of Arizona—the Border Patrol agents—are strained, security missions are taking a hit, and it has become even more challenging to process and care for the volume of migrants they see coming across the border.