

NOT VOTING—5

Graham Markey Warnock
Hickenlooper Ossoff

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 44, the nays are 51. The motion is not agreed to.

The motion was rejected.

The majority leader.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I enter a motion to reconsider.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Motion to Proceed

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I move to proceed to the consideration of Executive Calendar No. 379, Micah W.J. Smith to be United States District Judge for the District of Hawaii.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Executive Calendar No. 379, the nomination of Micah W.J. Smith, of Hawaii, to be United States District Judge for the District of Hawaii.

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. DURBIN. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. DURBIN. Mr. President, as in legislation session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1250; that the Durbin amendment, which is at the desk, be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. I think I would like to—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. I am sorry. Proceed.

Mr. DURBIN. I thought that they told me the script was for some other reason.

I ask consent to withdraw the request until—I made a misstatement, and Senator GRASSLEY and the Senator from Idaho would agree.

Mr. CRAPO. I would. I would agree.

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

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Mr. DURBIN. Thank you. I am new here. I am sorry I made that mistake.

Mr. President, for years, one of the greatest challenges facing American families has been the rising cost of prescription drugs. A recent AARP survey found that the price for the top 25

medications used by seniors has tripled, on average, since those drugs came to market. Those drugs include: Xarelto, Trulicity, Januvia, Jardiance, Humira, and Eliquis.

Now, I imagine most Americans already recognize the names I have read. They sound familiar because they are among the most heavily advertised products and medications on television. You may even have seen one of these ads during the Thanksgiving parade you and your family watched or while you watched a football game this weekend.

Every year, Big Pharma spends more than \$6 billion each year on ads. That is the size of the entire budget of the Food and Drug Administration. In fact, we know that most pharma companies spend more on advertising than on drug research and development of new drugs.

It turns out, the United States is one of only two countries in the world that allows people to run ads on television for prescription drugs. Anybody want to guess the name of the other one? New Zealand. That is the only other country that allows this to occur.

You want to know why pharmaceutical companies spend so much money promoting their drugs? Because it increases their profits dramatically. The average American sees an average of nine ads per day, nine. Pharma thinks if they pummel you with enough ads that you will finally learn how to pronounce and spell Xarelto. You will insist to your doctor that this is the one blood thinner you really need. Sometimes it is easier in a 10-minute meeting for a doctor to just write the prescription than to take the time to explain why the drug may not be needed or a generic version might be just as good for a lot less money.

With billions in targeted spending, patients are bombarded with information but kept in the dark about one fact. Of all the things they mumble and chatter about at the end of these ads, the one thing they never want you to know is how much these drugs cost, the price.

This name is probably familiar to you if you watch television at all, Rinvoq. With billions in targeted spending, patients are bombarded with information like the name of this drug. Take Rinvoq—which is manufactured by an Illinois-based company, AbbVie, for eczema and arthritis—it is now the most advertised drug on TV.

AbbVie spent \$315 million last year on TV ads for Rinvoq alone, but nowhere in the ad did they tell you how much it would cost. Want to guess what it costs for Rinvoq each and every month? The figure is \$6,100. Think about that for a moment.

Well, Senator GRASSLEY and I think it is time for Big Pharma to end the secrecy about the real cost of these drugs. If they are advertising a drug, they should disclose the price upfront. It is a basic transparency measure for patients.

We have introduced bipartisan legislation to require price disclosure in direct-to-consumer drug ads. Our plan is very simple. It has actually passed the Senate once before in 2018. In a minute, we are going to ask consent to pass it again.

Here is why we think this transparency is so important. Earlier this year, a study found that more than two-thirds of drugs advertised on TV were considered “low value.” Those pricey wonder drugs with ads showing people golfing and having fun, they are often no better than the other, more affordable versions of the drugs. So don’t you think it is worth knowing right away that Rinvoq is going to cost you \$6,100 per month rather than waiting for that moment of truth at the pharmacy counter?

One in five Americans do not take their medications as prescribed because they cannot afford it. They cut their pills in half or skip doses because they can’t afford to take the medications as prescribed. Don’t take my word for it. These advertisements often urge you to “ask your doctor if it is right for you.” So we did.

The American Medical Association said:

Direct-to-consumer advertising . . . inflates demand for new and . . . expensive drugs, even when these drugs may not be appropriate.

Think about that—inflating demand for new and expensive drugs, even when they are not the best drug that the person should take.

In 2018, Senator GRASSLEY and I asked the GAO to look at the impact of these ads on television on Medicare’s budget. The GAO found that between 2016 and 2018, these drugs accounted for 58 percent of Medicare spending on drugs. The drugs on television are more than half of the budget of Medicare’s spending on drugs. These ads ballooned Medicare spending to \$320 billion over 3 years. Humira topped the list with \$500 million in advertising in 2018, which contributed to 2.4 billion in Medicare costs.

Let me show you this Humira chart so you get an idea of what we are talking about. I used this chart in 2017 when I first introduced this legislation and when the monthly cost of Humira was a mere \$3,743 a month. Guess what has happened. The cost of Humira has now risen to \$6,900 per month. Shouldn’t AbbVie, the pharmaceutical company that makes Humira, disclose that real cost of the drug to you so you can use the information in making treatment decisions?

Our bill is supported by AARP, which speaks for seniors across America; the American Medical Association, which speaks for doctors across America; the American Hospital Association and 88 percent of Americans support the concept of this bill. How can anyone object to it?

Hold on tight. You will find out.

In fact, President Trump supported it. After our bill passed the Senate but

was stopped by a single House Republican, President Trump issued rules to require these pricetags. Famous for his tweets, here is one that I want to advertise. Look what he said:

Big announcement today. Drug companies have to come clean about their prices in TV ads.

This is from former President Trump.

Historic transparency for American patients is here. If drug companies are ashamed of those prices—lower them.

I didn't always agree with President Trump, but he was sure right on in that statement. In fact, he supported our bill.

Unsurprisingly, Big Pharma went to the courts to stop this legislation. They hate the idea of being open, honest, and transparent with the American people about the price of their drugs because they are afraid it is going to cut into their profits.

Senator GRASSLEY has been a great partner, and I want to ask him why he believes it is important to bring a dose of sunshine to these airways.

Senator GRASSLEY.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Well, you just heard Senator DURBIN say that this bill has passed the Senate once. It is still not law. We are back here again, and I hope my fellow Senators will see that Senator DURBIN and I don't give up on this very important issue of trying to bring a dose of sunshine to the airwaves.

Lowering the cost of prescription drugs is a top priority of mine and most of the Senators here. Without prescription medication, millions of Americans would not survive. As a nation, we are incredibly blessed to live in a country where investment and innovation unlock cures and treatments.

But the escalation in price of prescription drugs, partly caused by this advertisement that goes on, are a consuming concern for millions of Americans, including Iowans who bring up this subject regularly at my county meetings.

I have come to the floor of the Senate to address the sticker shock that greets consumers when they pick up their medicine at the pharmacy or open their medical bills after a hospital visit.

In recent years, I have worked in a bipartisan manner to pass the CREATES Act, another bill called the Patient Right to Know Drug Prices Act, and another one, the Right Rebate Act into law. Each of these bills lowered prescription drug prices for patients and taxpayers by stopping anti-competitive practices, putting sunlight on medications for consumers at the pharmacy counter, and to keep drug companies in check.

I was chairman of the Finance Committee when we hauled Big Pharma in for public hearings. As chairman, I also partnered with the senior Senator from Oregon on a groundbreaking 2-year investigation of insulin pricing. That investigation focuses not only on insulin

manufacturers but also powerful pharmacy benefit managers—PBMs.

I have worked to hold PBMs accountable by putting sunlight on their practices and working to ban their anti-competitive behavior that increases the cost to patients, rural pharmacies, and the taxpayers.

In this Congress, I have gotten passed the Prescription Pricing for the People Act out of the Judiciary Committee and with bipartisan support. I hope the Senate doesn't miss the opportunity to hold the Federal Trade Commission accountable by requiring the 6(b) study of drug middlemen to be produced within 1 year instead of the typical 3 to 5 years that it takes the FTC to do something.

I have also worked with the junior Senator from Washington State to pass the PBM Transparency Act out of the Commerce Committee with bipartisan support. The FTC can play an important role in holding PBMs accountable in spread pricing and clawbacks across all health insurance.

I have also contributed to and supported two Finance Committee mark-ups this year that included six of my PBM accountability and transparency provisions. I am supporting the PBM provisions that have come out of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to deal with this problem in the commercial insurance market.

I hope the full Senate doesn't ignore the aggressive actions the four committees have taken this Congress to hold PBMs accountable. We must enact these bold committee-passed bills into law. If we are timid, we will be right back here a few years from now still fixing the problem.

On top of PBM reforms and accountability, we need price transparency; so that brings me back to where Senator DURBIN and I are right now. With that background, I now go to the purpose of this unanimous consent request and the Durbin-Grassley bill to bring important price information to prescription drug consumers. When patients complain about the high price of drugs, it is usually because they got their bill or found out how much it costs when they were at the pharmacy counter. They didn't have the ability to know the price before they bought it. Knowing what something costs before buying is common sense. So working with the Senator from Illinois to require the disclosure of medication list prices and advertisements makes common sense. President Trump pursued this through regulations, and the Senate even passed this measure—as Senator DURBIN has already said—a few years ago.

Each year, the pharmaceutical industry spends \$6 billion in direct-to-consumer drug advertising to fill the airways with ads, resulting in the average American seeing nine direct-to-consumer ads each day. Studies show that these activities steer patients to more expensive drugs even when a lower cost generic is available.

The Government Accountability Office has found that prescription drugs advertised directly to consumers account for about 58 percent of Medicare spending on drugs. We ought to require the disclosure of this list price so that patients can make informed choices when inundated with drug commercials.

Consumers and taxpayers would benefit from a dose of sunshine. By passing the Drug-Price Transparency for Consumers Act, we could begin the process of reforming the incentives in our prescription supply chain that reward high-cost drugs and their manufacturers, along with powerful middlemen.

If you watch these commercials on television, you see a lot of information very quietly stated by the drug companies such as the side effects possible from using some of these drugs. You get all the information about what these drugs will accomplish, but you don't know what they cost. And that information ought to be available to the consumer.

I thank Senator DURBIN for giving me this opportunity to express my view on this piece of legislation.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1250

Mr. DURBIN. I want to thank Senator GRASSLEY. He is a proud Republican conservative. I am on the other side of the spectrum. I am a Democrat, proud of my progressive background.

The two of us agree on this because it is common sense. If the drug companies are going to spend a fortune, billions of dollars—more than they spend on research for new drugs—advertising these drugs, we have a right to ask: What does it cost? Is that such a tough question to answer? Not if you are proud of your product. Not if you are proud of the price you are charging.

But if you don't want the American public to know, you conceal the price and you send Senators to the floor to object.

Now, both political parties spend an awful lot of money on political opinion surveys: What are Americans thinking? Do you know what shows up as a No. 1 concern year after year after year? The high cost of prescription drugs. That isn't getting any better.

If you ask insurance companies: Why does the cost of health insurance keep going up? The No. 1 driver: the high cost of prescription drugs.

If you ask: What are we going to do about Medicare's runaway costs? You have to do something about the high cost of prescription drugs.

We are addressing that issue directly, but there are only four U.S. Senators on the floor of this Senate for this occasion, because we are not going to go to the measure and actually debate and consider it. It is going to be pushed aside for a procedural reason, and it will go back to an empty floor and an empty Chamber waiting for the next rollcall on a nomination.

The American people have lost faith in this institution because we are afraid to tackle the real issues they

care about. This is one of those issues. It is a bipartisan matter, even approved by former President Trump, and I am sitting here talking about it. It is an indication to me that this is an idea whose time has come.

So, Mr. President, now at the appropriate time, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1250; that the Durbin amendment, which is at the desk, be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, Americans deserve a transparent, affordable, and accessible prescription drug market. I agree with the concerns that each of my colleagues have raised here tonight. The current system fails to meet these needs, and I appreciate the intentions of my colleagues in attempting to shed light on the opaque pricing system that we now face. The problem is that the solution proposed in Senate bill 1250 is the wrong solution.

If you listened carefully to the debate of my colleagues, their main objection was that the prescription drug companies are advertising and promoting and creating markets for their products. Their solution is to have them tell you what the price is, and what they are asking in their legislation is that the prescription drug manufacturers be required to state their list price.

But we all know that the list price is not actually the correct price, and it will actually create confusion even further by forcing these pricing numbers to be put out into the marketplace through commercial advertising in a way that will then, I believe, undercut the major reforms that we are now undertaking in the Finance Committee to get the opaque system eliminated, to shed transparency onto the system, and help all consumers—including the United States Government—to understand what the real price is.

Senator GRASSLEY referenced three or four of his bills that we are working on in legislation right now in the Finance Committee that make major reforms to achieve this very price transparency that I am talking about. We had a markup on that legislation just recently, and it passed 26 to 0 in the Finance Committee. It is ready to come to the floor. It will deal with many of these things that have already been discussed here, but it will not create a mandate that the wrong price be advertised on TV.

Far too often, heavily concentrated health plans and PBMs force consumers to pay on that list price for prescription drugs, exposing seniors and

working families to catastrophic costs. This bill, if enacted, would mandate the inclusion of these inflated figures in virtually all medication ads, reinforcing the notion of the list price as the best pricing opportunity for consumers.

Respectfully, I see these requirements as moving our current system in the wrong direction by affirming deceptive price points that should never be the basis for a patient's cost or decisions.

A drug's list price includes none of the discounts, none of the rebates or other price concessions found in the net price—the real price that is paid between the insurers and the PBMs and often then dealt with in pharmacies that are integrated with the insurance companies and the PBMs.

A recent study showed that this gap between the list and the net price continues to inflate every year. In 2022, for instance, sticker prices for branded drugs, like those you have seen on charts here, grew by 3.7 percent; whereas, the net prices—the real price—which was not able to be figured out by the consumer accounting for rebates and discounts, remained unchanged.

For medicines like insulin, the gap between the list and the net price can exceed 80 percent.

Rather than broadcast and validate list prices, Congress should ensure that patients can share in the savings that are reflected in net price points, enabling both increased transparency and reduced out-of-pocket costs at the pharmacy counter. The better act—the one I just referred to that is coming out of the Finance Committee with a 26 to 0 vote—would take numerous steps toward achieving this goal with sizable cost-sharing reductions for seniors and no premium hikes. This proposal before us today, by contrast, would risk rubberstamping the centrality of sticker prices that no consumer should need to pay under a rational healthcare system.

I share the concerns of scores of patient advocates and clinicians who agree with the need for more transparent pricing but disagree with the approach taken by this bill. As many of these groups have pointed out, list price disclosures can trigger confusion for consumers and deter healthy, proactive doctor-patient discussions.

In fact, I would think that the drug manufacturers would love to have their list price—the one they want to start out asking for—be the one that is marketed.

For Americans with solid prescription drug coverage, list prices provide no direct insight into what a patient will actually pay for a given drug. For the population more broadly and for policymakers, the mandates in this legislation do nothing to unearth critical information on the price concessions routinely withheld from consumers.

Additionally, the bill's free speech concerns warrant further discussion

and scrutiny, and its transformation of CMS into an advertising regulator raises legal questions of mission creep and Agency scope. I stand ready to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reduce patient costs and to move toward more transparency in the marketplace. That said, for numerous reasons, I cannot support this legislation and must object to its passage.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. The Senator from Idaho is my friend. We have worked together and served together, and I count him as my friend.

I would just say that arguing that the list price is deceptive suggests that there is some third party, some Agency—perhaps in Government—that is creating this list price which we are asking to be on the ads that the pharmaceutical companies put on television.

Do you know who creates the list price, Mr. President? The pharmaceutical companies themselves. We go directly to them. Give us the list price. You saw what happens over the span of a few years: The list price can double.

Who is creating that doubling in the price? The pharmaceutical companies themselves. And, now, to argue that the price that they agree on, that they advertise, is one that is somehow deceptive to consumers just doesn't square.

Have you ever heard of AARP, the American Association of Retired Persons? Most of us respect them because we have worked with them over the years. They speak for seniors. They have endorsed this bill. They don't think it is confusing or deceiving to tell consumers how much these drugs actually cost.

Let's get down to reality. Whether it is from healthcare providers or pharmaceutical companies, many times the starting price is not the end price. But you never know where that is going to end up. It depends on the insurance company, for example, as to how much they are going to reimburse or whether there are any copays involved in it. So the one price we can stick with is the price created by the pharmaceutical companies themselves.

Is it so confusing to consumers that you can't state a number? They get it. They know what the cost is. What they don't get and what they may not understand is all of that mumbling that goes on at the end of the ads: Don't take this drug if you are allergic to this drug. Incidentally, this drug may kill you.

You listen to all that stuff, and you say: How in the world can they jam in all of that information in just a few seconds?

Listing the price of a drug on TV is very simple, very straight, and very honest and transparent. Pharmaceutical companies should want to join in that effort.

I thank Senator GRASSLEY for coming to the floor to join in this effort today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

ISRAEL

Mr. BUDD. Mr. President, a month and a half ago, Hamas terrorists committed a horrific act of barbarism. More than 1,200 innocent Israelis and 33 Americans were murdered in cold-blooded acts of evil. It was the deadliest massacre of the Jewish people since the Holocaust and the deadliest foreign attack on Americans since 9/11.

The Middle East is no stranger to violence, but the October 7 attack was particularly heinous: systematically hunting down and slaughtering young people at a concert; kidnapping elderly women out of their homes; beheading babies and burning them in ovens. The line between good and evil is as clear as it has ever been.

For the remaining innocent hostages currently being illegally held in Gaza, the terrorists and the terror continue. While we are grateful for the release of some hostages over the weekend, our hearts remain with those still being held. This includes several Americans, including Keith Siegel, a native of my home State of North Carolina.

So let me be as clear as I can: Hamas's continued holding of these innocent hostages is a violation of the law, and it represents a complete disrespect for the value of human life. Every single one of them must be released, and all levels of our government must remain united in working to get them home.

In this clash between good and evil, the question that the United States should be asking is, Who can we count on to be on our side, and who stands on the side of the terrorists?

This brings us to the state of Qatar. This is a nation that hosts Hamas's so-called political office, including Hamas leaders. From the safety of Doha, these terrorists gleefully watched and celebrated the attacks on October 7.

Now, it is important to remember that Qatar is a major non-NATO ally of the United States, and it hosts U.S. military forces at Al Udeid Air Base—a strategically important location for our operations in the Middle East. Our two nations are friends, but sometimes friends must be honest with one another.

You see, Qatar claims that they only host Hamas at the request of the U.S. Government and in coordination with Israel. There is some truth to this. Since October 7, Biden administration officials, such as CIA Director Burns, have beaten a path toward Doha, hoping that the Qatari Government's hosting of Hamas's senior leadership would provide a pathway toward ending the hostage crisis that Hamas initiated.

I certainly agree that the U.S. Government, including both the administration and Congress, should be doing everything it can to bring the hostages home, including working through allies and partners, and, to be sure, Qatar's

mediation with Hamas's leaders has helped free some hostages, but at what cost and to what end?

In exchange for the release of innocent women and children who were kidnapped by Hamas, Israel was forced to exchange three Palestinian prisoners for every one innocent Israeli victim. Many, if not all, of these prisoners were arrested, charged, and sentenced for stabbings, attempted car bombings, and other heinous crimes as part of the campaign of terror. Some have already returned to the fight, donning the infamous Hamas headband and calling for the slaughter of more Jewish people.

Every day that goes by without a resolution to the hostage crisis exposes Qatar's decision to host Hamas as both foolish and flawed.

Earlier this month, I met with the Qatari Ambassador in my office. I told him in no uncertain terms that his government must pressure Hamas leaders living in Doha to immediately and unconditionally release all hostages.

In the nearly 2 months after Hamas's horrific October 7 massacre, however, we need to recognize that Qatar's current approach, while yielding limited successes, is attempting to do something unacceptable, and that is to legitimize Hamas.

Simply put, there is no future for Gaza or the Palestinians that includes Hamas. In the past 2 months, we have watched Hamas leaders use Qatar's hospitality to buy time—prolonging the war and the hostage crisis from the comfort of their luxury accommodations. While Palestinians suffer in Gaza because of the war that Hamas started, we have seen Hamas leaders push their genocidal agenda from Doha, including in multiple meetings with Iran's Foreign Minister and even in a visit to Moscow. If Qatar's leadership believes that any of this is consistent with what Washington has asked of them, it is not.

So my message to the Qatari Government is very simple: Stop this now. You are hosting a brutal terrorist organization with American blood on its hands and who is holding American hostages. Your media organizations, starting with Al Jazeera, are regularly pushing out Hamas's propaganda that only further inflames tensions in the Middle East. Your leadership continues to speak out of both sides of its mouth—on one hand, committing to negotiate a resolution to the hostage crisis while, on the other, blaming Israel and absolving Hamas at every turn.

We need to tell our friends in Doha loudly and clearly: Qatar is accepting a significant liability with its pro-Hamas policy.

So we must end this myth that this policy is something that Washington wants and urge the Qatari Government to end this policy immediately.

This is personal for Americans, and I have met with the families of hostages right here in Washington. I have heard their stories. I look at their photos

every day on my desk. Every day that these families have to live with the pain and uncertainty is unacceptable. We must stand united and say: Not one more day.

We must also start thinking about the day after because there will come a day when Israel will halt its military operations in Gaza because they will have achieved their stated goal of destroying Hamas. The remaining question will then be what to do with the Hamas leaders in Doha. My view is that they should be extradited to the United States so that these terrorists can face justice in a U.S. court of law for killing and kidnapping American citizens.

I would hope that our friends in Qatar will not only be partners for peace and stability but will also be partners in ensuring that Hamas and its leaders are brought to justice for the despicable acts of terror they have committed.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

BIDENOMICS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I rise today to talk about the failures of Bidenomics and to talk about the devastating impact Bidenomics has had on American families.

Certainly, people in Wyoming are worried about the high cost of groceries. I hear it every time I am at the grocery store. People wince every time they fill up the gas tank. People have turned to either raiding their savings accounts or taking on increasing debt just to stay up to the current cost of living.

President Biden has a message for all of these people who are wincing as they fill up, who are worried about the cost of groceries, and who are raiding their savings accounts. Joe Biden's message to them is just this. He says: Don't believe your lying eyes. That is what he believes.

Tomorrow, the President will be in Colorado, and he is going to say some things that the American people just will not believe.

He will say inflation is getting better. He will say Bidenomics is working. He will say that anyone who believes anything other than that is just a victim of misinformation. Well, that is not what the families of America are feeling. Americans know that they are subjected day in and day out to incredibly high prices, and they know that Joe Biden is the President of high prices.

Before Thanksgiving, we got new inflation data, and prices went up again. Prices are now over 17 percent higher today than they were the day Joe Biden took office. In real terms, families are paying over \$900 each and every month more now for their cost of living than they were for the same things the day Joe Biden came into office. Americans are feeling it everywhere but specifically in the cost of gas, the cost of groceries, and the cost of everyday goods.

As prices continue to go up, people are falling further and further behind when it comes to trying to pay their bills.

Let's look at personal savings accounts. Do people have more money or less in their bank accounts now than they did before? Well, the answer is clearly they have less. Bidenomics is forcing three out of every five Americans to live paycheck to paycheck.

Let's look at personal debt. Credit card debt now exceeds \$1 trillion. This is a record high in the history of the United States.

Let's look at interest rates. Americans are maxing out their credit cards just to get by, and they are having to do it at higher interest rates just to pay their bills, so their debt number continues to go up.

Under Bidenomics, Americans barely have enough money to pay their bills, let alone save for the future.

President Biden equates Bidenomics with the American dream. So what do people think about the American dream? Well, for most families right now, that American dream is further and further out of reach than it has ever been before.

According to a recent poll by NBC News, only one in five Americans today feels confident that their children's lives will be better than their lives were. That is an alltime low, and this is talking about the future and the loss of hope for a better future.

President of the United States Joe Biden is disturbingly out of touch. According to NBC News, President Biden is baffled—baffled—that the American people are unhappy with the state of the economy. It is not baffling; it is the definition of “Bidenomics.” Americans are unhappy with the economy because they don't like paying 20 percent more for food, \$1 more for a gallon of gas, or 8 percent mortgage rates. So why is the President of the United States so disconnected from the feelings of everyday Americans?

Well, hard-working Americans deserve better leadership than what they have gotten out of this White House for the last 3 years. On issue after issue after issue, President Biden's actions have made matters worse. He has continued and increased wasteful Washington spending. The Democrats are as guilty as he is. He keeps attacking our affordable, available, reliable American energy, and my home State of Wyoming is America's energy breadbasket. He has pursued the costliest regulatory burden in American history. The regulations coming out of this administration are penalizing and punishing and are costing the American people a lot.

Let there be no confusion that the policies of Joe Biden and the Democrats are why families have suffered the worst inflation in 40 years. Democrats have done nothing to correct course or steer the economy in the right direction. Instead of working to cure inflation, Senate Democrats tell Americans to endure it. They are push-

ing policies that increase spending and choke off American energy—policies that keep driving prices and costs higher.

Two weeks ago, President Biden met with the Chinese President, Xi. It was their first face-to-face meeting this year, 2023. Tensions with China continue to rise. Yet President Biden seems more eager to appease President Xi than to address China's serious threat to America's economy and safety. None of this lowers the cost of living. None of this makes our country stronger.

Republicans have solutions to get the country back on track. Our solutions will lower the cost of living, will increase wages, will reduce Washington redtape, will unleash American energy, and will end our Nation's dependence on China.

In this Congress alone, Republicans have put forward legislative solutions—workable, meaningful solutions—to restore a strong economy. We have introduced bills to reverse these political mandates and eliminate these punishing regulations. We have introduced bills to end America's dependence on China, reduce dependence for manufacturing, reduce dependence for medicines, and to promote our own manufacturing. We have introduced bills to increase America's production of oil, gas, coal, and critical minerals. That would immediately lower the cost of energy and groceries for families all across America.

Under Joe Biden and the Democrats, America is heading in the wrong direction, and by overwhelming numbers, the American people will tell you that.

Republicans have solutions to make a difference—to lower prices, to unleash American energy, to secure the southern border, and, in time, to get America back on track. The time to act is now.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

ISRAEL

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, so far—so far—the United States is standing behind Israel, as it should, in Israel's fight against Hamas—so far.

Don't go wobbling on us, President Biden. Don't go wobbling on Israel.

But some people in Washington seem confused as to why America backs Israel. I am seeing a lot of hand-wringing from folks who like to pretend that there is some kind of—they use this word a lot: “nuance”—that there is some kind of nuance we need to apply to the Hamas terrorist attacks of October 7 before we can condemn Hamas and hold its supporters accountable. President Obama has even suggested that somehow we are all complicit in the bloodshed.

Some people promoting this idea of nuance, frankly, believe that Israel got what it deserves. Now, they don't say that, but that is what they believe. They believe that Israel got what it deserved. These folks who believe that

also apparently believe in diversity, equity, inclusion, and the right to kill Jews.

Thankfully, that is not most Americans. That is a lot of people here in Washington, DC.

In Louisiana, however, my State, we understand that the debased people who slaughtered hundreds of young people at a peace concert are the bad guys. In Louisiana, we understand that the odious men who raped women, raped and sodomized women next to the bodies of their dead friends, don't deserve to be on this planet. We in Louisiana understand that the degenerates—the degenerates—who forced kidnapped Holocaust survivors to pose for photos—to pose for photos, for God's sake—next to their terrorist captors are just wrong.

Nothing—nothing—that the Israeli Government has ever done or could do warranted throwing grenades at children hiding in a bomb shelter. Why are some people reluctant to admit that?

You don't need to read a treatise on the Middle East to know that only monsters—monsters with black hearts—would put a baby in an oven and flip on the switch, as one first responder reported. That is not nuance; that is evil.

The evil we saw unfold when Hamas butchered Israeli civilians is indefensible. It is indefensible. Those terrorists brutalized thousands of people, including dozens of our American friends and neighbors. Hearing the stories from the survivors and from the first responders—it is nauseating. It is not nuance; it is evil.

Yet the Hamas terrorists took joy, they yelled for joy, as they massacred civilians. One terrorist called his mom—called his mother—to brag that he had “killed 10 Jews with my own hands.” Who would brag about something like that? Another Hamas official celebrated the violence and vowed to continue to wage attacks like this “again and again and again” until Israel no longer exists.

No family in Israel will be able to sleep soundly at night until these terrorists are wiped off the face of the Earth.

Israel has both the right and it has the responsibility to defend itself. I am proud that the United States of America is supporting Israel.

Don't go wobbling on us, President Biden. Stand your ground. Don't go wobbling.

I am proud that the United States is supporting Israel. The world will be a safer place for Israelis and Americans alike when Hamas ceases to exist.

Hamas leaders told anyone who would listen—anyone who would listen—they told us exactly what they intended to do and wanted to do and will continue to do. They told anyone who would listen that their goal is to kill as many Jewish people as possible, and that is still their goal.

This wasn't a protest against Israel's Government; it was a massacre of Jewish people—the largest since the Holocaust.

It is not surprising, then, that some who oppose intervention in Gaza have turned to attacking Jewish Americans.

In New York City, those people cornered Jewish students in a library, forcing a librarian to offer to hide the students in an attic. At Cornell University, they threatened to shoot up the kosher dining hall. At my State's Tulane University, activists broke a student's nose because he opposed their anti-Israel demonstration.

These protests didn't occur in New York City or Cornell or Tulane by accident; they targeted these areas because they are home to many Americans who happen to be Jewish. That is just a fact. New York is home to the largest Jewish population outside of Israel. Tulane, in my State, which was the first university in the South to welcome Jewish students, has a student body today that is roughly 40 percent Jewish. It was no accident.

When confused activists twist themselves in knots trying to justify the torture and the rape and the killing of Jews in the Middle East, they are feeding the fires of anti-Semitism here at home as well. Unfortunately, we have seen that over the past few weeks.

Let's not forget—it is Hamas who is using civilians as human shields. Hamas is the group also hoarding fuel and food as Palestinian civilians starve. Hamas is the group that dug up water pipes to turn them into rocket launchers.

The truth is that the Palestine people, the people of Gaza, and the Israeli people all suffer because of Hamas, and any suggestion that Israel is culpable for this suffering plays into the hands of the terrorists.

In Louisiana, we can see through the pseudo-intellectual hand-wringing of Israel's critics. The truth is that Hamas brutalized Israeli citizens and then ran home to hide behind their women and children, using those women and children as human shields. They are the lowest kind of pond scum, the lowest kind of sadists imaginable.

Over the past week, Hamas has released some hostages as part of a temporary cease-fire. I am happy for that, and the American people are happy for that. I and they hope that every hostage will be reunited with their family soon. We cannot forget, however—we should not forget, however—that Hamas vowed to continue attacking and kidnapping Israeli citizens again and again and again, and the only way to stop this cycle is to eliminate Hamas.

I was out of the country, in another country, when Hamas attacked Israel, and I did not know what position President Biden would take. I didn't. He said: I am standing with Israel. I was so relieved.

I know President Biden is under a lot of pressure from the loon wing of his party to abandon Israel, to demand a permanent cease-fire, to let Hamas go unpunished. But Hamas doesn't want a permanent cease-fire. Hamas had a per-

manent cease-fire on October 6, the day before they attacked Israeli civilians, and Hamas forfeited that cease-fire unilaterally.

Here is what Hamas wants: Hamas wants to terrorize Israel until all of the Jewish people are dead. Hamas wants to terrorize Israel until all of the Jewish people are dead. Hamas wants to kill Jews. Hamas wants to kill Jews and drink their blood out of a boot.

That is not nuance, President Obama; that is evil.

President Biden needs to show the world—and, frankly, some members of his own party—that the United States of America and its good people will continue to stand with Israel until Hamas is in ruins, until Hamas is dead and we drink their blood out of a boot, until Hamas's genocidal agenda is abandoned.

The world will be safer on that day, and it will certainly be safer because Hamas is not in it. By supporting Israel's efforts, Americans are helping to ensure that an attack like October 7 never happens again, and I think most fairminded Americans understand that.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. 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 GENERAL GLEN D. VANHERCK

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have had an opportunity over the years to work with some extraordinary leaders in our military, but one of the exceptional leaders whom I have recently come to know and work with is Gen. Glen D. VanHerck. He is the commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command—we know it as NORAD—and the U.S. Northern Command, or USNORTHCOM.

General VanHerck is preparing to retire after more than 36 years of service to our Nation. As I mentioned, he is an individual whom I have come to know over the recent years, and I am proud to have been able to work with him in parts of my career. But I want to ensure that his distinguished service, which includes successful commands at every level—as director of the Joint Staff and a long list of U.S. Air Force assignments, flying the F-15, the F-35, and the B-2—is all reflected in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

General VanHerck has led by example and served selflessly throughout his career. He has always, always thought of the men and women under his command. He has thought of their families. He has thought of our future and the world that we all hope to leave for our grandchildren.

I know that General VanHerck and his wife Marilyn are looking forward to his upcoming retirement, but I would hope that he will continue to serve in a different way, utilizing his extraordinary expertise and knowledge.

From August 2020 to November 2023, General VanHerck oversaw the most robust and dynamic transformation in the history of NORAD and USNORTHCOM. This transformation enabled the commands to support the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Canada while ensuring the defense of both homelands. His direction singlehandedly resulted in decisive national and international military operations that operationalized the commands and shifted from a reactive regional focus to a more proactive and globally integrated campaigning effort.

General VanHerck has also been instrumental in leading a wide range of homeland defense operations, including defense efforts against Russian long-range aviation, North Korean intercontinental ballistic missiles, and Russian and Chinese out-of-area maritime operations. He established a clear strategic vision, focus, and priorities, inspiring consistent operational and organizational excellence throughout pandemic response operations; Operation Allies Welcome, which supported over 84,000 Afghan refugees; and the first kinetic engagements of hostile objects over North America in the whole history of NORAD and USNORTHCOM.

General VanHerck also led a collaborative effort to focus on homeland defense, the top priority of the national defense strategy, by adopting a modernized and integrated deterrence approach toward strategic competitors. Prioritizing domain awareness, information dominance, decision superiority, and global integration empowered NORAD and USNORTHCOM to successfully campaign day to day in competition and will improve the commands' ability to deter in crisis and defeat, if necessary, in conflict.

General VanHerck's strategic foresight and collaboration with members of the highest level of government, both here in the United States as well as in Canada, guided the commands to look beyond traditional approaches and customary missions and to examine evolving adversary actions, capabilities, and intent.

Recognizing an urgent need to advance NORAD and USNORTHCOM's capabilities to outpace peer competitors and rogue nations, General VanHerck operationalized the commands, reaffirming their unyielding commitment to the highest priority mission of homeland defense.

In response to our adversaries' efforts to operate and train in and through the Arctic region, NORAD executed the northernmost deployment of fighter and supporting aircraft from forward operating locations in Northern Canada to Pituffik Space Base in Greenland, formerly known as Thule.

For its part, USNORTHCOM oversaw Arctic Edge—this is the largest exercise in Alaska—in 2020, deploying a joint and combined force of 800 to advance communications, domain awareness, infrastructure, and sustainable

presence in coordinated air, land, maritime, and cyber domain field training.

Additionally, for the first time ever, USNORTHCOM led a large-scale, multicombatant-command, homeland defense exercise from the USS Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group while the strike group was under USNORTHCOM's operational command. This allowed four combatant commands and NORAD to conduct homeland defense operations, exercise joint integration, conduct multinational operations, and strengthen interoperability in command and control.

Throughout, General VanHerck clearly articulated warfighter requirements, including the need for ready, trained, and well-equipped forces that are capable of operating wherever they are needed. That, in turn, has led to significant advances in Arctic capabilities for the joint force, including infrastructure upgrades at northern bases, improvements to the Joint Pacific Alaska Range Complex, and facilities to support deployment of ground-based air defense systems at Eielson Air Force Base.

These forward-looking efforts have also led to testing cold-weather technologies, developing deployable extreme-cold-weather expeditionary capabilities, evaluating satellite and terrestrial Arctic communication solutions aboard an icebreaker, and significantly increasing communications coverage in the region.

Mr. President, as one who has focused on the Arctic for decades now, I can attest that General VanHerck gets the Arctic. He knows and understands the value and the significance of the Arctic. He gets it.

Across decades and assignments, General VanHerck continuously demonstrated a clear strategic vision for defending the homeland, and his focus and priorities consistently yielded operational success and organizational excellence. His leadership and passion have defended the people of the United States and Canada, and, for that, we are grateful.

So to General VanHerck, I thank you for your long and your distinguished career in the service of our Nation, and on the occasion of your well-deserved retirement, I wish you and your family nothing but the very best and congratulate you for a job well done.

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

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business with Senators be permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO MARY ELLEN STONE

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to honor and congratulate Mary Ellen Stone on her retirement, after 44 years of service leading the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center, KCSARC. Over that time, she has laid essential foundations, establishing and strengthening the organization into what has become a respected, comprehensive nonprofit provider of supportive services for survivors of sexual assault and their families. Her passion, tenacity, and leadership have shaped KCSARC into the strong, vibrant nonprofit it is today.

Mary Ellen began at KCSARC in 1979, serving about 100 clients with a staff of 3 and a budget of \$50,000. As she retires in 2023, the nonprofit serves 5,000 survivors and their families with a staff of more than 70 and an annual budget of \$8.2 million. Over four decades, Mary Ellen has been a bold, visionary advocate for sexual assault survivors throughout King County and the State of Washington. Mary Ellen was influential in establishing the State's first accreditation process for sexual assault providers, professionalizing service delivery and ensuring core services are available to survivors in every county of the State.

Under Mary Ellen's leadership, KCSARC published one of the first educational pieces in the Nation for parents to talk with their children about sexual assault called "He Told Me Not to Tell." It was a milestone for community awareness about child sexual abuse. Today, this publication remains a foundational educational tool, and its importance and relevance remain to this day as half of KCSARC's clients are children and teens under 18 years old. Mary Ellen's vision and tenacity allowed KCSARC to respond to specific unmet needs in the community, including to sexual assault survivors who are experiencing homelessness, children and youth survivors, and Latino survivors.

Mary Ellen has shared her time and expertise in so many ways to better inform systems and communities about the needs of victims, including serving on the Seattle Archdiocese Review Board, Mental Illness Drug Dependence Oversight Board, Seattle Chief of Police Search committees, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Sex Offender Management Committee, Women's Funding Alliance, and Municipal League Seattle-King County.

It has been a great privilege to work with Mary Ellen—a true trailblazer—over the last four decades. And it is my honor to thank her for her lifetime of dedicated service to people in King County, the State of Washington, and the entire country. I wish her the very best during her well-earned retirement.

HONORING CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER 3 STEPHEN R. DWYER

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, today, I want to honor CW3 Stephen R. Dwyer, who lost his life during an MH-60 Blackhawk crash in the Mediterranean Sea earlier this month.

Steve graduated in 2004 from Enterprise High School in Alabama. He then followed in his parents' footsteps, both Army veterans, and attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He became a field artillery commissioned officer, but his true passion was flying. So Steve returned to Fort Rucker for flight school, becoming a helicopter pilot. During his time in the military, Steve fulfilled multiple missions around the world, including two deployments to the Middle East.

He is remembered as an exceptional pilot, devoted husband, and loving father. His supervisor at West Point Mark Ray said, "Steve Dwyer was an incredible man, son, brother, teammate, and friend. He was a dedicated Special Operations warrior, who went above and beyond to serve our nation in the most difficult missions at hand. He was born into a family of servant leaders and died 'For your freedom and mine'—an act that our nation was created through and defended by today. He will be truly missed by all that knew him. 'Night Stalkers Don't Quit!'"

Steve leaves behind his wife Allie, three boys, parents, and countless other family and friends. We are deeply grateful for his heroic sacrifice to our country.

TRIBUTE TO GRAY MAXWELL

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I rise today to share news with the Senate. Dennis Gray Maxwell—Gray to all of us—my floor director and most senior legislative adviser since I arrived in the Senate almost 17 years ago, is retiring at the end of December. For many of us, Senators and staff alike, this is heartbreaking news, as we will miss Gray's good counsel, impeccable speechwriting skills, remarkable knowledge of Senate history, and award-winning home brew. He always has a relevant story, whatever the circumstance. And, of course, Gray was the one who got us to finally put the Senate Democratic Conference rules in writing, so it is no wonder that he knows them inside and out better than any Senator or parliamentarian.

Gray loves the Senate. He loves it for all it was meant to be, as drafted by the Founding Fathers, and all that it should be in modern times—a respected