

military veterans, boosting investments in veterans' health and funding the PACT Act, which is going to allow those who were injured in service to our country by burn pits, for example, an opportunity to get the best quality medical care and to care for veterans sickened by service-connected exposure to toxic hazards.

This is important: According to the White House, if you earn less than \$400,000 a year, the President's budget won't raise your taxes one dollar. That bears repeating. If your family earns less than \$400,000 a year, your taxes under the President's budget will not go up one penny. He made that promise when he ran, and he has stuck with it.

The President pays for this plan by making the ultrawealthy, over \$400,000, and big corporations finally pay their fair share. When 55 of the largest corporations in America paid no taxes—zero—last year, that is not a conservative precept; that is a big con, and it is not fair.

Now, we know the President's plan is just an opening bid of what promises to be a long, complicated budget process. We will undoubtedly see alternative proposals from both sides of the aisle. That is the nature of negotiations and debate. But it does take two sides.

I have to join with the Democratic leader in the Senate to say: Speaker MCCARTHY, where is your plan? Where is your budget? You talk big, but you don't produce anything. We want to see it.

During the last administration, our Republican colleagues voted to add nearly \$8 trillion to the national debt. From the last administration was the single-largest increase in America's national debt than any other previous President. That is nearly one-quarter of all the debt accumulated since the beginning of this Nation. It happened in the last 4 years under the previous President. Most of the \$8 trillion in new debt was piled on before the pandemic. A lot of it was spent on tax cuts for the wealthiest people in America and the corporations they own.

Now they say they want to eliminate the deficit in a decade. As Senator SCHUMER said earlier, it just doesn't pass the laugh test, let alone the math test.

What is the plan to do that? Put it on paper. Put it on the table, and let's see it, Speaker MCCARTHY. Are you going to cut education? healthcare? medical research? aid for veterans? FEMA?

The President's plan is on the table. Republicans have a responsibility to come up with a credible, serious counteroffer, not just bumper sticker slogans.

#### EQUAL PAY DAY

Mr. President, on a related note, it was 60 years ago that John Kennedy, as President, signed the Equal Pay Act. The law was simple. Here is what it said: Women should not be paid less than men for the same work—simple. Yet, 60 years later, we are still not there—60 years.

Today is Equal Pay Day in America. Let me tell you what that means. This is the day when the average American woman will finally earn as much as the average man did last year. In other words, on average, it takes women 15½ months to earn as much as men do in America in 12 months.

The pay gap persists despite the law I told you about. Here is the reality: Women in America are still paid less than men even when they do exactly the same job. On average, a woman in America makes 82 cents for every dollar a man makes. This means that women who work full time year-round lose up to \$400,000 over the course of their working lives. When you include part-time and seasonal workers, women make only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. The pay gap gets even wider for women of color, who lose up to \$1 million over the course of their working lives. And less pay during your working years means less retirement income, we all know.

Apologists offer all kinds of explanations and justifications, but the persistent pay gap among men and women is sexism, plain and simple. And it doesn't just hurt women; it hurts their families, who depend on them. Additionally, while men's wages rise throughout their lives, women's wages rise more slowly, and the gap widens if they have children.

President Biden's budget proposal contains a number of important measures that will help working families make ends meet. It includes affordable childcare—what a high priority that is for every working parent—and paid family and medical leave so that women, who are also primary caregivers in most families, don't have to stop working to care for a loved one.

But those measures, as necessary as they are, will not close the inexcusable pay gap for women. We need to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act, closing loopholes in equal pay after finally giving women the tools they need to hold employers accountable if they break equal pay laws.

House and Senate Democrats reintroduced this essential legislation last week. I want to thank my colleague Senator PATTY MURRAY, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, in particular for her leadership on this issue.

We are committed to passing the Paycheck Fairness Act, and we need Republicans to make it happen. If they believe in fairness, as I think we all do, if you care about the financial security of working families, stand with us, and let's finally pass this bill.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oklahoma.

#### BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I often come to the floor of the Senate to talk about one particular item as I want to be able to walk through what we are going to do to be able to solve it.

Honestly, today, it is a little different for me. In some ways, I feel a lit-

tle bit like Will Rogers with his statement, the famous Oklahoman, who said that all I really know is what I learned from reading the newspapers, which is an alibi for my ignorance.

Today, I want to just be able to talk about random stories that I have read lately that are kind of in the "you can't make this stuff up" column. It has been frustrating for me.

Right now, 7 in 10 Americans feel like America is on the wrong track—7 in 10. I mean, I don't know why, but they just feel like something is not going right, like things are out of control. It has been frustrating to me to be able to go through so many news stories lately and to be able to say: If I put this in front of 7 in 10 or maybe 9 in 10 Americans, they would say, "Why are we doing this as a nation?"

Now, I understand a lot of the issues we face are complicated. Yet, quite frankly, some of these issues are not complicated; they are common sense; they become political only in this city. But for most of America, it is just not that complicated. Sometimes I just get frustrated with the language and the things that are coming out of not just the administration but with the things that are happening in our Federal Government right now that, I think, just need to be called out and for us to say: Let's as a Senate sit down and talk about some of these complicated issues. Instead of knee-jerk political reactions, let's try to solve some of these hard things because we are currently talking about it, and things are going sideways instead of things being solved.

Over the past 5 days, we have watched the collapse of the Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank—a big bank in San Francisco and a much smaller bank in New York. For both of them, we have now had the FDIC step in, and they are going to save every single person in the bank and make sure they are whole. Now, that is very different than cyclical. Most Americans know you are insured up to \$250,000, but the Biden administration stepped in and said: Oh, no. Everyone is going to be kept 100-percent whole.

The comment that has come out of it has been: Well, we are going to make sure no taxpayers have to be able to cover this bill. Then, if you listen closely, the very next statement is that it is going to come from an assessment on the banks instead.

Let me tell you what that means.

As one of the wealthiest banks in America, which has mostly millionaires who actually bank there—in fact, to show that, for 90 percent of the depositors in Silicon Valley Bank, their deposits exceed \$250,000—OK?—90 percent. That is not normal for a bank. For that bank in San Francisco, all of their depositors are going to be bailed out, and the way that they are going to be bailed out is they are going to put a special—what they are calling—assessment on banks across the country.

So let me tell you what is happening in the next few months.

Banks in Oklahoma, in rural towns, are about to pay a special fee to be able to bail out millionaires in San Francisco. Now, what Oklahoma banks and bankers had to do with that bank failure in San Francisco I have no idea, but the comments being made over and over again are that no taxpayer is going to be affected by this. I am sure my bankers will be glad to know that they don't pay taxes anymore, apparently, and I am sure every person who banks there will be interested to know when their bank fees go up and their interest rates go down so as to be able to cover what happened in San Francisco.

Listen, I don't want to see a contagion of banks either, but let's be honest. What is really happening is a backdoor tax increase on every single American. They are just not using the IRS to do it. They are using community banks to do it all over the country—to charge them a quick higher fee, which they know will mean a higher fee to the people who are members of their banks. That is how it is going to get covered rather than the typical way this would get covered—by actually taking that bank, actually doing an auction and auctioning it off to other banks to be able to take it in.

I look at that and say: You can't make this stuff up, in some ways, to be able to say no taxpayer is going to be affected, but quietly taxpayers across the country are going to be affected by this.

Mr. President, I was surprised when I saw the President's budget come out, when he said this is a new budget and a new way to be able to reduce deficits, when the budget proposal he had was \$6.8 trillion. That is the spending number—\$6.8 trillion. To put this in perspective, in just 2019—4 years ago—the total spending for the Federal Government was \$4.4 trillion. That was the last year before COVID—\$4.4 trillion. Now, post-COVID, the President's budget is \$6.8 trillion in new spending.

Mr. President, I visited with some folks on immigration recently, and it was interesting. In January, the numbers went down a little bit for illegal crossings, so the Department of Homeland Security immediately put out “numbers are down.” Even before the month was done, the numbers came out that the numbers were down in January. Now it is the middle of March, and we can't seem to get the numbers for February because the best guess-estimates we have is that they have skyrocketed back up again, so the DHS is no longer talking about it.

They have released a new proposal, though, to be able to expedite individuals on asylum, to be able to get through under asylum here, which is a good thing, by the way; but with their current structured proposal, they will do about 500 people a month through this new asylum process and procedures when we actually have 5,000 people a day illegally crossing. So their new proposed answer is how to expedite

hearings for 500 people a month when the problem is 5,000 people a day.

In addition to that, the Biden administration just released a new set of rules on what will constitute, as they say, “violent crimes.” These are individuals who are illegally present in the country who are due to be deported. They are trying to redefine what “violent crimes” mean and who is eligible for deportation in the country. Part of what they are redefining is, Who are sex offenders and how would you define a “sex offender” and who would be guilty of that?

Can I just tell you? I won't find very many Americans who would say: We only want part of the illegal sex offenders in the country. Yet the Biden administration is quickly trying to redefine what equals a sex offender and who actually has to be deported from that group.

Mr. President, I met with the Director of the FBI last week and had a conversation about a memo that the FBI put out just a month ago, saying that there is a threat of terrorism coming from traditional Catholics and that they need to have further investigation.

To their credit, the FBI pulled that back quickly after they released it, after the Director saw it, and the Director, unequivocally, distanced himself from it. But why did that ever start in the first place? Why was there an office in the FBI that considered traditional Catholics to be a threat to the country?

In the Federal workforce—it was interesting—just about a month ago, there was a big to-do. As a matter of fact, there were some here, even in this room, who made a big to-do about how the IRS is doing so much better. The literal statement was made: After we pass the Inflation Reduction Act, the IRS now has a much higher percentage of answered calls. And there was a celebration on the floor here.

Well, I have to tell you, that is a good thing to be able to answer more calls because there have been millions of unanswered calls from the IRS. So I went to check the data because so many people were saying the percentage of calls answered is much higher than what it was last year, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act. I went and pulled the data on it to be able to look at it and to see what that was, just to be able to check the facts.

Here are the actual facts: Half as many people called the IRS last year as did the year before. In fact, the IRS actually answered 100,000 fewer calls than they did the year before. It is just that so many millions of people stopped calling them, knowing that they are not going to get an answer at all. The percentage looks better because fewer people were trying, but the actual number of answered calls actually went down. Literally, you can't make this stuff up. We need to stop celebrating better percentage when the real facts are fewer calls were actually answered by the IRS.

In the category of “you can't make this up,” the Office of Personnel Management, who runs the Federal hiring process—I just wrote a letter to them a few days ago because two of their leadership individuals and senior management team are now going to need to be fired because in their previous employment, they had credible accusations of harassment. This is the office that is designed to be able to oversee hiring in the Federal Government that failed to do background checks on senior management they were hiring.

In the category of “you can't make this stuff up” in the Inflation Reduction Act again, there was a lot of to-do about drug pricing and them saying we are now going to control drug pricing. Here is what also has occurred with that: Four drug manufacturers have now pulled new cancer drugs from the American market. Just in the last 6 months, four new cancer drugs have been pulled because they are saying they can't make it work with the new Inflation Reduction Act law.

If I want to stack on top of the Inflation Reduction Act, there was a huge section on green energy within the Inflation Reduction Act—which is really what the act really was, was a new Green New Deal bill. There was a huge section all about how we are going to do more energy production, more battery production for electric batteries. The future of green energy is going to be in America; and as the President said over and over again, it is going to be made in America.

In fact, I sat in on the President's State of the Union Address, and this is what the President said during the State of the Union Address. The President said:

Folks, I know I have been criticized for saying this, but I am not changing my view. We are going to make sure the supply chain for America begins in America. The supply chain begins in America.

So when we do these projects—and, again, I get criticized about this, but I make no excuses for it—we are going to buy American. We are going to buy American, folks. And it is totally—it is totally consistent with international trade rules. Buy American has been the law since 1933, but for too long, past administrations—Democrat and Republican—have fought to get around it but not anymore.

That is what the President said down the hall at the State of the Union Address.

What has happened in the last 3 weeks? The President's team has actually worked with Japan to create a false free-trade agreement because there is an exception in the Inflation Reduction Act that if you want to do green energy production, you have to do it in North America or you have to have a free-trade agreement. We don't have that FTA with Japan, so they are creating a type of FTA with Japan so Japan can sell us batteries. So much for “the previous administrations are the ones that tried to work around that.”

I would love to say it is isolated, but they just did the same thing with Germany, to create a workaround in the

Inflation Reduction Act's MADE in America Act so that the MADE in America Act and Produced in America Act will now also include Japan and their production, will now also include Germany and their production.

May I just say to you, one of the largest new North American battery manufacturers for EV just got moved to Canada, not the United States—so much for “past administrations have fought to get around it, but not anymore.” This administration is working around the MADE in America, Buy American Act right now for green energy. Where did they get their supplies and their critical minerals? It is not from the United States; it is from China.

In the energy environment—while I am still talking through that as well—the Willow Project has been talked about greatly with Alaska and saying that now ConocoPhillips is going to be able to produce off three platforms more oil coming from Alaska. That is good, by the way. We have a steady supply of oil that can come for a very long time from Alaska, and it has been blocked off over and over and over again, when the law states that property is set aside for energy production.

But in the process, the Biden administration not only allowed three platforms to start producing oil, but then they blocked off 3 million new acres from production—3 million.

There was recently, in the United Arab Emirates, a set of meetings in the Middle East dealing with the Abraham Accords. It is interesting, when I am traveling around that absolutely beautiful country and seeing the wealth that is there, I couldn't help but think, this is what Alaska would look like if the Federal Government would actually allow energy production there like there is energy production in the UAE. But our Nation won't allow it. Instead, we are still buying from other nations rather than allowing full production on our own. You can't make this stuff up.

If you talk to a developer right now, they will tell you it is very hard to develop new neighborhoods and new locations because they can't get transformers, those little boxes that sit on the edges of neighborhoods. Some of those are the transformers that are up high. Those transformers have a 99.55 percent efficiency—99.55 percent efficiency. I wish I had that layer of efficiency.

The Biden administration just put out new rules for those transformers—that are very hard to get right now because they are back-ordered—to add a 0.1 percent new energy efficiency requirement on them. Remember, they are already 99.55 percent efficient. They want them to be 99.65 percent efficient, so they are moving just that little decimal right there. To do that, it is going to slow down production of the transformers again—could be up to 16 months slower—and it will increase the cost by hundreds of millions of dollars.

So when your electricity bill goes up and they are not able to continue building an expansion, that is not the fault of your electric company; that is the fault of your Federal Government right now so they can brag about increasing production by 0.1 percent on something that is already 99.55 percent efficient.

Put this on top of the Biden administration's new exploration to be able to cut off gas stoves. They initially announced from two different Agencies that they are going to try to end gas stoves in America and then quickly pulled that back and only said: Oh, no, we are just going to study gas stoves in America, and we are going to look at trying to be able to shut those off in the future, but we are not going to do that right now leading up to the election because there are millions and millions of people who use gas stoves, which, by the way, have been studied for years across the country.

This is not an issue about particulars in the house; this is an issue about an administration that doesn't care about the cost to the consumer, as long as they can say they got their way.

It is the same exact issue on the EPA's heavy-duty electric vehicle emissions rule. That rule is rightly being addressed by my colleague from Nebraska, who is going after a very simple thing that the EPA is trying to be able to do in this Biden administration that will raise the cost of trucks up to \$8,000 per vehicle. Listen, there are a lot of long-haul folks who cannot afford \$8,000 per vehicle just to be able to follow a new Biden administration policy.

Listen, I put all these things together because as I read the news and as I go through the different things that I go through on a daily basis and be able to read through things, at some point, I look at it, and I think, Who says this makes sense? Where are these things coming from? If I pull any one of these out and put them in front of the vast majority of people in Oklahoma and ask, Is this the direction the country needs to go, they will say no.

This Senate needs to talk about the direction the Nation is going when you put controls around Agencies, that they just can't make up the rules based on their own preferences.

This is not just an issue for our consumers; this body had a wake-up call this weekend when we watched China broker a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the U.S. State Department was not at the table because our foreign policies are collapsing around the world. That is a threat to American national security. It is not just an absence of American policy making a difference, it is an absence of our American values. When China's values are on the move worldwide, that is not a safer world that we are living in. We need to shift the direction this is going. And it needs to be soon.

With that, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nebraska.

WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, almost 20 years ago, a family in Idaho purchased a lot in a residential area near Priest Lake.

They were looking to build a home. They obtained county building permits and started placing sand and gravel on their property to get it ready for the build. But shortly after the family began preparing their lot, the Environmental Protection Agency told them to stop. There was water on their building plot with no surface water connection to any body of water. But because of its proximity to Priest Lake, the EPA said that placing sand and gravel on the property violated the Clean Water Act.

The Clean Water Act prohibits the discharge of pollutants, such as the rocks and sand used to prepare a building plot into navigable waters.

Navigable waters are ambiguously defined by the Clean Water Act as “waters of the United States.” That is more commonly known as WOTUS.

Normally, navigable waters are defined as waters that are deep; they are wide; and they are calm enough for boats or ships to go across. The surface water on the Idaho family's lot certainly doesn't fit that bill.

The Idaho family tried to challenge the EPA. They sought a hearing, but the EPA chose not to grant them one and, instead, continued to assert the Clean Water Act jurisdiction against their land. So Michael and Chantell Sackett sued.

They had been to the Supreme Court once, and they are back again this year. They still haven't been able to build on the property that they first acquired in 2004.

The Sackett v. EPA Supreme Court case centers on interpretation of the Clean Water Act. What counts as waters of the United States?

In 2015, the Obama administration published an unprecedented expansion of the definition of WOTUS, giving the Federal Government jurisdiction over a State resource—that is, Nebraska's water. It doesn't belong to the Federal Government.

I fought former President Obama's WOTUS rule since my very first term here in the U.S. Senate. The rule was the Federal Government at its worst. It encroached on families, on communities, and on businesses by its brazen intrusion into the precious water resource of my home State of Nebraska—and all the rest of our States as well.

The Trump administration rescinded Obama's WOTUS rule, but when President Biden took office, he reversed that. The President issued a new rule allowing EPA officials in Washington, DC, to make case-by-case determinations of what should be considered water of the United States. Privately owned land containing ponds, puddles, and even dry ditches can now be regulated by the Federal Government. This