

capped interchange fees at 0.3 percent in 2015.

Rewards programs haven't gone away in either place. In fact, most major European airlines offer rewards programs that are comparable, if not better, than the ones offered in the United States. The reason is simple: Banks have to compete against each other for customers, and there are few things that make one credit card more attractive to a customer than others, other than perhaps a better rewards program. This dynamic won't change when the Credit Card Competition Act becomes law.

That brings me back to the hearing. The Judiciary Committee last held a hearing on competition in the credit card market in May of 2022. Visa and Mastercard have increased their fees since that hearing and are planning to do so again next month. Even in the midst of concerns about inflation, they keep raising this fee over and over again, even as consumers are trying to fight the fires of inflation.

That is why I invited the CEOs of Visa, Mastercard, United Airlines, and American Airlines to come testify before the Judiciary Committee on April 9.

Guess what? All four CEOs rejected my invitation. They are just too darn busy to come and explain the major source of profits for their businesses. They are too darn busy to come explain what they are doing to consumers and families across America.

Some say: We just don't understand the issue well enough to testify before your committee.

They are the CEOs of the company, and they don't understand the issue? Like their attacks on my bill, the CEOs' excuses why they can't appear before the American people to answer questions don't hold water.

Killing the Credit Card Competition Act has been and remains a top priority for these companies, as evidenced by the more than \$51 million lobbying effort that they have undertaken against my bill. I guess I should feel flattered that they would spend \$51 million lobbying to try to stop this legislation; but, frankly, it infuriates me that they won't come before this committee under oath and testify, yet they are spending all this money in secret fashion.

Several of the CEOs have been personally engaged in this issue. Scott Kirby, who is the CEO of United Airlines, told investors that my bill is "bad policy" and that he had personally "spent a fair amount of time in DC talking about [the bill]." Mastercard CEO Michael Miebach told investors he was "closely engaged" in efforts to defeat this legislation.

If these CEOs are willing to discuss the Credit Card Competition Act with Wall Street investors and lawmakers behind closed doors, they should be willing to answer questions before the Senate Judiciary Committee and the American public under oath.

If the credit card market really is working for small businesses and con-

sumers, then I say to Ryan McInerney, Michael Miebach, Scott Kirby, and Robert Isom: You should have nothing to hide. The fact that you are refusing to appear and publicly defend your skimming of every credit card transaction in America speaks volumes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJAN). The Senator from Arkansas.

EL SALVADOR

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, I recently returned from a trip to El Salvador, where I met President Nayib Bukele and saw firsthand the effects of his remarkable transformation of that country from the most dangerous nation in our hemisphere to one of the safest.

As we drove around San Salvador, the images were commonplace yet extraordinary—children played soccer in the parks, young women jogged at twilight, couples dined outdoors—commonplace because one should expect to see such scenes in any decent community; extraordinary because they were unheard of just a few years ago.

Unfortunately, this trip was also a reminder that President Biden is as weak, unpopular, and divisive abroad as he is at home. And just as he coddles criminals and cartels in our own country, he too often sympathizes with them in other nations.

Since taking office, President Biden has refused to meet President Bukele, Secretary of State Tony Blinken has criticized him, and the administration has significantly reduced foreign assistance to his government.

One must ask why. After all, President Bukele is the most pro-American leader in Latin America, and he overwhelmingly won two elections—free and fair elections, I must add, contrary to liberal allegations. Indeed, one of his bigger vote shares came from Salvadorans living outside the country, including in the United States, far removed from any supposed intimidation or coercion inside El Salvador.

It is not surprising because, after years of bloodshed, the Bukele government is bringing stability and safety to a country that desperately needs it, which is also good for America. There has been a 40-percent drop in illegal Salvadoran migrants arriving at our border.

No, Joe Biden doesn't oppose President Bukele for good or fairminded reasons. He opposes President Bukele because he is tough on El Salvador's murderous gangs, the most prominent of which is MS-13, a group with the psychotic motto "kill, rape, control."

Our own country has experience with this sadistic gang. In 2017, not far from here in Wheaton, MD, members of MS-13 beheaded a man, cut his heart out, and stabbed him over 100 times. The year before, members of the gang murdered two teenage girls on Long Island, NY, using baseball bats and a machete. And just last year, an illegal immigrant member of MS-13 in California was convicted of torturing and mur-

dering a 10-year-old boy. Let me say that again. He tortured and murdered a 10-year-old boy.

That is what MS-13 has done here in America, the richest and most powerful Nation in the world. It has done far worse to the people of El Salvador. And MS-13 isn't alone. Factions of the infamous 18th Street gang also terrorized the country. Before the government's crackdown, more than 100,000 gang members and associates roamed the streets of the nation of fewer than 6½ million people. For years, they waged war with each other and the government, turning neighborhoods and cities into ungovernable battlefields. They would impress preteen boys into their gangs or demand preteen girls provide sexual favors—or they would kill the whole family and still take the boy or girl.

As a result, El Salvador has long been one of the most dangerous nations on Earth. Indeed, it was so dangerous that many of my Democratic colleagues have argued that those fleeing the country should automatically be eligible for asylum here. In late March 2022, 2 years ago, the nation reached its breaking point when gang members committed 87 murders in a single weekend, killing more people in 3 days than were killed in the entirety of the previous month. Tragically, March 26, 2022, marked the deadliest day in El Salvador since the end of that nation's civil war 30 years ago.

Finally, people had had enough. President Bukele requested the declaration of a state of emergency, and the National Assembly agreed. The government surged troops throughout the country, overwhelming the gangs and arresting and imprisoning its members. One active gang member told reporters:

There were too many soldiers everywhere all at once.

According to recent estimates, the Bukele government has imprisoned more than 75,000 gang members and killed hundreds more. President Bukele's prison-or-death anti-gang strategy has worked. In 2022, the number of murders in El Salvador dropped nearly 57 percent and then dropped another 70 percent last year. In 2018, the Salvadoran murder rate stood at 53 per 100,000. Last year, it was 2.4 per 100,000. For context, Washington, DC, had a murder rate of 40 per 100,000 last year. That means I was much safer 2 days ago in what was once the murder capital of the world than any of us today are in Joe Biden's Washington.

Yet Joe Biden, one of the least popular, least successful, and most procriminal leaders in the world, is lecturing one of the hemisphere's most popular and accomplished Presidents on crime. In particular, the Biden administration has expressed concern that the emergency declaration, which suspends certain due process protections, is a threat to the rule of law—apparently, an even greater threat than the marauding thousands of gang members still at large.

President Biden evidently doesn't understand that order is a prerequisite for law. Indeed, it is a prerequisite for nationhood. Without order and the state's monopoly on force, you don't have a country, and you certainly can't have a democracy.

Perhaps President Bukele's tactics are harsh. I don't think so, but I will grant you that. But they were also absolutely necessary to establish order. And I would remind the Biden administration that El Salvador's gang members aren't victims; they are murderers, rapists, and many of them have American blood on their hands.

I saw up close thousands of these savages—or devils, as President Bukele puts it—when I toured the Terrorism Confinement Center, the massive new prison housing tens of thousands of gang members. The inmates live together by the dozens in group cells. They don't go outside. They don't take classes. They don't get visitors. Most will never leave.

Armed guards are everywhere you turn inside the triple-walled prison, including on the steel-grate ceilings so guards can monitor the inmates from above. Some so-called human rights groups whine about this prison. I guess they think it is too harsh. And it is not Club Med, I will concede, but the inmates receive food and water, they conduct personal hygiene daily, and doctors and nurses work at an aid station next to the cells.

Those same groups also complain about a supposed lack of due process. I don't know. Call me crazy, but if it is illegal to belong to a gang and you have got MS-13 tattoos all over your face and body, I am not sure what more process you are due. Maybe that is just me.

No, the victims aren't the devils I encountered at the Terrorism Confinement Center. The people of El Salvador are the victims. After years of abuse, law-abiding Salvadorans, particularly those from poor and working classes, overwhelmingly support President Bukele's efforts to restore order and a meaningful rule of law.

I am hopeful that El Salvador's leaders will help bring stability and prosperity to a nation that deserves better than gangland terrorism, and I urge the administration that if it is unwilling to help, at least stay out of the way.

Finally, the example of El Salvador not only exposes the failures of President Biden's approach to foreign policy but also his approach to crime. If nothing else, President Bukele has proven once again that incarceration works, obviously. If you lock up murderers, amazingly enough, there will be fewer murders—a truth so obvious that only liberal ideologues could miss it.

Sadly, that is what we have in many places in today's criminal justice system: progressive lawyers who refuse to prosecute criminals; progressive judges who refuse to sentence them appropriately; and progressive politicians

who pass jailbreak bills to release them. So long as we continue to pursue these progressive policies, our communities will, sadly, continue to look more and more like El Salvador—not the El Salvador of today but of just a few years ago.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

NATIONAL AGRICULTURE WEEK

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this week, we celebrate National Agriculture Week. It is a time to celebrate America's farmers and ranchers, the hard-working men and women who fill America's supermarkets and Americans' dinner plates. Much of daily life here in the United States depends on the food, fuel, and fiber that America's farms and ranches produce. And this week in particular, we thank those who do the hard work of feeding America—and the world.

There are a lot of factors that go into a farm's or ranch's success. Today, I want to talk about just one of those factors that affects a lot of farms and ranches, and that is trade. Trade is critical to the continued success of American agriculture. One in four acres on U.S. farms is planted to be exported to a foreign market, and exports are responsible for a fifth of U.S. farm revenue.

For the 2023 marketing year, American farmers planted nearly 70 million acres of major crops to supply international markets. But we have a problem. Thanks in large part to the Biden administration's almost complete inaction on trade, U.S. agriculture exports are declining. In fact, last year, the United States posted a \$16.6 billion agricultural trade deficit—16.6 billion. And that trade deficit, believe it or not, is projected to be nearly twice as large this year, in an area of our economy where typically we have run, historically, trade surpluses.

This would be bad enough on its own, but it is particularly distressing at a time of economic uncertainty for a lot of farmers and ranchers. Like so many other Americans, farmers and ranchers have suffered under President Biden's inflation crisis. Net farm income is expected to see its largest 2-year drop in 40 years.

We should be doing whatever we can to reverse this trend and help farmers and ranchers succeed, and a good place to start would be opening new markets for American agricultural products.

The sorry state of agriculture trade is emblematic of the Biden administration's generally unambitious trade agenda. The President made it clear early on that trade would not be high on his agenda, and unfortunately, he has lived up to that.

Increased market access—long a priority of the United States—has almost completely dropped off the radar under President Biden. The U.S. Trade Representative has openly said that the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which contains one of the few trade ini-

tiatives that the administration has actually undertaken, was, in fact, designed not—not—to include tariff reduction. In other words, the Biden administration deliberately chose not to pursue a key market-opening measure, and now, the Biden administration has put even this halfhearted trade initiative on hold, declining to move forward with the trade portion of the Indo-Pacific agreement.

A year ago, I came to the floor to discuss my bipartisan bill to kick-start negotiations on a comprehensive free-trade agreement with the United Kingdom. Now, you would think that a free-trade agreement with one of our oldest allies and largest trading partners would be a no-brainer, but the administration has punted on that one, too.

On digital trade—an area where the United States has historically been a leader and in which we should continue to lead—the Biden administration is pulling back. Last fall, the U.S. Trade Representative abandoned long-standing U.S. policy on digital trade at the World Trade Organization—a move that risks letting China take our place in writing rules for a major sector of the global economy.

The United States is currently negotiating zero—zero—free-trade agreements. But while the Biden administration keeps America on the sidelines, other countries are building up their trading portfolios. The European Union is negotiating new free-trade agreements. So is the United Kingdom. China is aggressively working to expand its trading network.

The Biden administration's failure on trade is putting our country at a competitive disadvantage. The administration is not only forfeiting opportunities for American leadership, it is harming American businesses, farms, and ranches that look to trade as a way to grow.

Earlier this week, I joined Senator BLACKBURN and other Senators in a letter to the President urging the administration to uphold America's long-standing leadership on digital trade. Last week, I led a group of Republican Senators urging the administration to work on expanding export opportunities for American agriculture.

If we want American farmers, ranchers, and business owners to succeed in the global economy, trade has to be a priority, and I will continue to do everything I can to urge the Biden administration to get off the sidelines on trade and start opening up new opportunities for American producers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes and Senator MANCHIN for up to 5 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 4364

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, yesterday at about this same time, I came to the