

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to speak for up to 7 minutes.

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

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, inflation numbers came out this morning, and it won't surprise anyone to discover that it was yet another month of elevated inflation, par for the course for the Biden administration.

Inflation that not only remained well above the Federal Reserve's target inflation rate for yet another month, it actually kicked up in March to 3.5 percent, not exactly a hopeful trend.

It has been a rough few years for the American people under President Biden, thanks in large part to the President and Congressional Democrats' decision to push forward with their American Rescue Plan spending spree, despite, I might add, warnings even from liberal economists that it ran the risk of setting off inflation. But now the entire Biden administration has been one long inflation crisis.

Today, a typical family is paying \$1,000 more per month to maintain the same standard of living they enjoyed when President Biden took office. Now, think about that for just a moment. Today, a typical family is paying \$1,000 more per month—\$12,000 more per year—to maintain the same standard of living they enjoyed when President Biden took office—if, of course, these families even have that money available. There is no question that there are families out there—a lot, I suspect—whose standard of living has diminished since President Biden took office because they simply don't have the money to maintain the same living standard with the elevated prices in the Biden economy.

The list of price hikes in the Biden economy is long. Groceries are up 21 percent since President Biden took office. Energy prices are up 38 percent. Gas prices are up 47 percent and are on the rise. The cost of shelter is up 20 percent. Car repairs and maintenance are up 30 percent. And the list goes on.

I mentioned the increase in grocery prices. The cost of food now takes up a larger share of Americans' disposal income than it has in 30 years.

A recent Bloomberg article noted:

Nationally, seven in 10 consumers say they are very or extremely concerned about the cost of groceries. . . . Forty-two percent said they were worried about having enough money to buy food in December, the last time FMI asked, compared to 26 percent at the March 2020 onset of the pandemic.

Well, that is a pretty grim statistic, and it is not the only one. On the home-buying front, one recent article reported:

The income needed to comfortably afford a home is up 80 percent since 2020.

Let me just repeat that.

The income needed to comfortably afford a home is up 80 percent since 2020.

Mr. President, 80 percent—and I don't need to tell anyone that incomes have

not risen by 80 percent over the same period.

President Biden loves to talk about giving Americans “a little bit of breathing room.” Well, Americans have lost their breathing room in the Biden economy. They have seen their disposable income dry up. They have had to downgrade their standard of living. They have had to turn to savings accounts and credit cards to make ends meet. It is no wonder that nearly half of voters say their personal financial situation is getting worse or that 55 percent of Americans say they worry a great deal about inflation or that 58 percent of voters say the economy is on the wrong track.

The sad thing is that President Biden has apparently learned nothing from his inflation crisis. He is still set on the same kind of massive government spending that helped plunge us into this inflation crisis in the first place. The budget he released last month was full of massive new spending programs, accompanied by a staggering \$5 trillion in tax hikes—tax hikes that would unquestionably have their own damaging economic effects, like discouraging job creation and driving up energy prices for hard-working Americans.

President Biden's first term in office has been characterized by economic misery for Americans, and if the President gets his way, a second term would likely be characterized by economic misery as well. It has been 36 months of elevated inflation in the Biden economy—36 months—and the end is still not in sight. It is starting to look like it won't be as long as President Biden is still in office.

I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF ANN MARIE MCIFF ALLEN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Judge Ann Marie Allen to the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah.

Born in Richfield, UT, Judge Allen earned her B.A. from Brigham Young University and her J.D. from Brigham Young University J. Reuben Clark Law School.

After teaching at BYU J. Reuben Clark Law School and Utah Valley University, Judge Allen began working in private practice under a public defender contract with Beaver County, UT, handling indigent defense cases and Criminal Justice Act panel appointments in Federal criminal matters.

In 2007, Judge Allen became the deputy Iron County attorney and prosecuted a range of felonies and misdemeanors. She returned to private practice in 2013 while also serving part-time as the deputy Garfield County attorney. In 2016, Judge Allen was appointed by the president of Southern Utah University to serve as the university's special counsel and director of ethics and compliance. She became the university's first general counsel in 2018. In 2020, Judge Allen was appointed by then-Utah Governor Gary R. Herbert to the Utah State Fifth District

Court. Over the course of her judicial career, she has presided over hundreds of civil cases and thousands of criminal cases resulting in plea bargains.

The American Bar Association unanimously rated Judge Allen as “well qualified,” and she has the strong support of Senators LEE and ROMNEY. Her nomination was unanimously advanced by the Judiciary Committee.

Judge Allen's significant courtroom experience and dedication to service make her an excellent nominee to the District of Utah. I will vote in favor of her confirmation and encourage my colleagues to do the same.

VOTE ON ALLEN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Allen nomination?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 100, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 120 Ex.]

YEAS—100

Baldwin	Grassley	Reed
Barrasso	Hagerty	Ricketts
Bennet	Hassan	Risch
Blackburn	Hawley	Romney
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Rosen
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Boozman	Hirono	Rubio
Braun	Hoeven	Sanders
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Brown	Johnson	Schmitt
Budd	Kaine	Schumer
Butler	Kelly	Scott (FL)
Cantwell	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Capito	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Sinema
Carper	Lankford	Smith
Casey	Lee	Stabenow
Cassidy	Lujan	Sullivan
Collins	Lummis	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Thune
Cornyn	Markey	Tillis
Cortez Masto	Marshall	Tuberville
Cotton	McConnell	Van Hollen
Cramer	Menendez	Vance
Crapo	Merkley	Warner
Cruz	Moran	Warnock
Daines	Mullin	Warren
Duckworth	Murkowski	Welch
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murray	Wicker
Fetterman	Ossoff	Wyden
Fischer	Padilla	Young
Gillibrand	Paul	
Graham	Peters	

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO). Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL UNDER CHAPTER 8 OF TITLE 5, UNITED STATES CODE, OF THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE FEDERAL HIGHWAY ADMINISTRATION RELATING TO "NATIONAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MEASURES; ASSESSING PERFORMANCE OF THE NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM, GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS MEASURE"

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume legislative session and proceed to the consideration of S.J. Res. 61, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 61) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Federal Highway Administration relating to "National Performance Management Measures; Assessing Performance of the National Highway System, Greenhouse Gas Emissions Measure".

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

ISRAEL

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, it has been more than 6 months since Hamas's horrific attack on October 7 that killed 1,200 innocent Israelis and led to the capture of 240 hostages. Around 130 people are still being held hostage, and an estimated 100 are alive and remain in captivity in absolutely horrific conditions. The cruelty that has been and continues to be inflicted on them is horrendous, and obtaining their freedom becomes a more urgent priority every day.

In the past 6 months, Israel's indiscriminate bombing has obliterated most of Gaza's infrastructure. Nothing has been spared. More than 33,000 Palestinians have been killed. Another 7,000 are believed to be buried beneath the rubble. And among the dead are hundreds of aid workers and health workers. Nearly 2 million people have been displaced. Aid trucks are lined up for miles in Egypt waiting to get into Gaza, while the bombs and shells keep exploding. The magnitude of this calamity is staggering.

Now, 6 months into this war, Prime Minister Netanyahu has announced that a date has been set for an invasion of Rafah. Rafah today is jammed with an estimated 1 million desperate, destitute Palestinians who were ordered by the Israeli military to leave their homes in the north—homes that have since been demolished—and who are now sheltering under plastic with the few possessions they could carry and not nearly enough food.

And last week, less than a month after Jose Andres briefed me and other Senators on the daunting challenges his remarkable organization, the World Central Kitchen, faces in getting food to desperate families in Gaza, Israeli missiles destroyed three of their vehi-

cles and killed seven of their aid workers.

The descriptions and coordinates of the World Central Kitchen vehicles that were targeted had been shared with the Israeli military. There was nothing about those vehicles or the people in them that could reasonably have been confused with Hamas. The vehicles were far apart. They were labeled as World Central Kitchen vehicles. Each was targeted and destroyed separately.

The deadly attacks on aid and health workers in Gaza have become shockingly common. World Central Kitchen and other humanitarian organizations, which so many people depended on, have had to suspend operations in Gaza. This incident and the killings of other aid and health workers must be thoroughly and independently investigated. Calling it a mistake begs the question: We need to know what happened and why.

This outrageous attack on aid workers and Prime Minister Netanyahu's plans to invade the very place his government told Palestinians to go is the latest evidence that the way the Netanyahu government is conducting this war is terribly wrong. It is yet another tragic reason why a cease-fire is immediately needed.

Our priority must be to secure a cease-fire to free the hostages and get adequate food, water, and medical care to the Gazan population before more innocent people die needlessly. This was affirmed unanimously in the resolution recently adopted by the U.N. Security Council.

But rather than acknowledge Israel's responsibility to implement that resolution and secure a cease-fire, Prime Minister Netanyahu criticized the United States for allowing it to pass. He said the U.S. abstention harms both the war effort and the effort to release hostages.

I could not disagree more. After 6 months of relentless bombing, the war in Gaza has been a disaster. It has been a disaster not only for the Palestinian people but for Israel, for the United States, for the hostages, and for the cause of peace and security in the Middle East.

Last week, families of the hostages were among the tens of thousands of Israeli protesters calling for Netanyahu to resign.

We need to ask ourselves what could possibly need to happen before the United States finally stops financing a war strategy that has so disproportionately killed civilians, used food as a weapon, made Gaza unlivable, and that has no realistic vision of a peaceful future for either Palestinians or Israelis.

I believe that the time has already come. Israel does not need more bombs for Gaza. The United States should stop paying for this.

What Mr. Netanyahu consistently fails to acknowledge is that the American people are paying for this war—a war that most Americans do not sup-

port. It is their tax dollars that have purchased the bombs, tanks, artillery shells, machine guns, and ammunition that have been used by Israel in what has become a war not just against Hamas but a war against the Palestinian people.

Overwhelmingly, Vermonters who have contacted me, like a substantial majority of the American people, are absolutely horrified about what is happening in Gaza.

In all the years he has served as Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu has never articulated the vision for an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To the contrary, he has been on a mission—which he has confirmed publicly—to destroy any possibility of a future Palestinian state while preserving Israel as a Jewish state.

Those goals are fundamentally incompatible, if Israel is to remain a democracy. And we support the Jewish democratic State of Israel. Yet, on March 22, the Netanyahu government announced the largest seizure of land in the West Bank since 1993.

Nothing can excuse the brutality of Hamas—we all know that—which, for years, has squandered precious resources that could have been used to improve the impoverished lives of the people of Gaza.

But just as Hamas's atrocities and the Iranians and others who aid and abet them should be absolutely universally condemned, so must we recognize that there is a long history to this conflict.

For years, the United States—Republican and Democratic administrations and this Congress—has unconditionally supported increasingly extreme right-wing governments led by Mr. Netanyahu, even though he has consistently acted in ways that are directly contrary to our policies, our principles, and our national interests.

In the West Bank in the past 3 years alone, Israeli land seizures, settlement construction, demolitions of homes, and violence against Palestinians have soared, in flagrant violation of international law.

But rather than hold the Netanyahu government accountable, U.S. government officials keep repeating the same tired refrain that such actions are "an obstacle to peace." And nothing changed. And despite evidence of human rights violations by Israeli soldiers, the Leahy Law has never been applied to Israel—not by this administration or any of its predecessors. And, meanwhile, Congress has continued to approve billions of dollars unconditionally for the Netanyahu government.

I have spoken many times about the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Month after month, as Gaza was being destroyed, I and others have called for greater access for aid trucks and the protection of civilians and aid workers. I have called for indefinite cease-fire. President Biden has called for a cease-fire. Vice President HARRIS has called for a cease-fire. And so has the U.N. Security Council.