

later, January 28, three American soldiers were killed in Jordan by Iranian-backed militias. Then there is the disaster of Afghanistan. On August 26, 2021, ISIS terrorists killed 13 brave American servicemembers. They were the first American military casualties in Afghanistan in a year and a half.

Twenty-year-old LCpl Rylee McCollum of Jackson Hole, WY, was one of them. This was a young man who loved his country and left an impression on everyone he met. He was our home State wrestling champion. He had recently been married. He was about to become a father. Madam President, 1,300 people in Wyoming showed up to attend his funeral. It was outdoors in a tent, 37 degrees, lasted several hours, and no one left because Americans deserve better than a President who forgets the sacrifices of American heroes and forgives the aggression of America's adversaries.

Joe Biden's weakness and confusion are a vivid contrast to what past Presidents have done.

I think of President Ronald Reagan and his successful policy of peace through strength. For 8 years, President Reagan built a strong national defense, he restored America's confidence, and he confronted America's enemies. His approach incredibly ended the Cold War without firing a single shot.

Three decades later, President Trump adopted a similar policy—no more apologizing for America like President Obama had done. We had strong borders. We had a strong military. We had a strong economy. And we had strong American leadership. Our allies respected us. Our enemies feared us. We were safer. It is time for America to return to that approach.

The truth is that Joe Biden is a President who cannot defend his record and cannot defend this Nation. For the safety of our Nation, we need a lot less of Joe Biden's weakness and a lot more peace through strength. That is what we need to do. That is the way we get America back on track.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

VETERANS HEALTHCARE

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, it was just a few weeks ago that I stood in this position on this floor and raised concern about how the Biden administration was undermining the law and restricting the ability of veterans nationwide to get healthcare closer to home.

Since then, 19 of my Republican colleagues have joined me in calling on the Biden administration to quickly reverse course and to lift these restrictions on community care that they have put in place, to the detriment of many of America's veterans.

One of those veterans, in my home State of Kansas, is Myca. Myca is an Air Force veteran and a single mother and a community leader. She does not have health insurance, and she relies

upon the VA to help her manage her autoimmune disorder and many other health issues.

Myca lives about an hour from the closest VA clinic, which is small and has a limited amount of services, and she lives more than 3 hours from the nearest VA medical center.

In her own words, she said:

I don't know what my health would be like or where I would be if I did not have my VA healthcare benefits in the community.

Congress passed and President Trump signed the MISSION Act 6 years ago to expand and protect the right of veterans to seek community care. Community care offers veterans across the country—and is particularly useful in States like many of ours that are so rural, certainly in States like mine—a much needed lifeline.

Often, it is the distance that causes a veteran to choose that he needs or she needs care in the community. Sometimes, it is expertise and specialty. However, in all instances, the Department of Veterans Affairs is making it harder for veterans like Myca to get the care they are entitled to under the law in the community.

In President Biden's administration, community care has come under attack, and veterans—many of them—are paying the price. In January, the Department's Under Secretary for Health commissioned an outside panel to examine community care spending. After being provided with select data and briefings, the panel recommended that VA save money by, among other things, reducing community care referrals for veterans seeking emergency, oncology, and mental health care.

There is not enough mental health care anywhere in the country. How could we restrict—why would we restrict, why would the VA restrict—access to mental health care in the community? These veterans are among our most vulnerable and high-risk veterans in the VA patient populations.

Since those recommendations were issued in the spring, veterans have been reaching out to me. As I have indicated on the floor before, many of the things I know about what is going on in veterans' lives come by the conversations I have with veterans or my staff has with veterans or phone calls, emails—the suggestion that something is not right in the way the VA is caring for a veteran. It often ends up in casework, and we try to solve the individual problem for the individual veteran.

We also ought to solve the system problems, and this is one that is now systematic. It is not the circumstance that an individual veteran is uniquely being denied care in the community. It has become a systemwide effort to reduce the opportunities veterans have to access care in the community.

I am sure my colleagues—Republicans and Democrats—if they talk to their caseworkers, our staff, people who deal with veterans' issues, you will see the same thing is happening in your community with your veterans.

Most recently, I spoke about this on the floor when it turned out the VA had denied a cancer patient the last two cancer treatments where he has received the first 58 but was told he had to return to the VA—more than an hour away, to the VA hospital—to receive the 59th and 60th cancer treatment.

And, most recently, I think if you would check with the folks in your offices who know these things—and I would guess many of my colleagues have heard this themselves—time and time again, someone who has had chiropractic care in the community is being denied the opportunity to continue to see their chiropractor and told: No, if you are going to have chiropractic care, you must have it at the VA hospital.

We are also hearing, beyond our own constituents, from whistleblowers within the VA, people who work at VA medical facilities, and they are telling us—they are telling me—that they are facing increasing pressures from the VA leaders to keep veterans in VA medical facilities, whatever the choice is of the veteran.

Incidentally, at the same time, the VA has actively indicated they are going to reduce the number of employees at the Department of Veterans Affairs, working in VA medical centers, by 10,000.

I am grateful to my colleagues who join me in opposing these policies, and I appreciate that effort.

Let me take this step with just a little bit of history. At a point in time, not too many years ago, we had veterans dying within the VA system because they couldn't access the care. Phoenix comes to mind. And, as a result, Congress responded and passed the Choice Act.

The Choice Act said: If you live a certain number of miles away from a VA hospital—a VA facility—you can access care at home with your own physician, your own hospital.

The VA was very reluctant, very reticent, and very difficult in the implementation of the law passed by Congress and signed by the President. And so we tried it again with the MISSION Act, a few years later. And one of the main provisions of the MISSION Act says that if it is in the interest of a veteran, he or she can have care where they choose to have it. And the best care of the veteran is defined not by the VA. Let me say that more clearly. The best interest of the veteran is not defined by the Department of Veterans Affairs but by the veteran and his or her healthcare provider.

So the choice under the law rests with the veteran, not with the VA, and yet the VA is once again undermining the law and trying to make certain that those choices that a veteran, he or she, can make are not made by the veteran but made by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The veteran who wants chiropractic care at home, who has seen the same

chiropractor for years, is told: No, we don't care what you want; we want to do it our way.

These policies are very damaging and could put us back in the same position in which the life and well-being of veterans across the country are impacted, are affected, and damaged.

I would again ask, along with my colleagues—which I hope is much broader than just a Republican set of colleagues; I hope my Democratic colleagues and my Republican colleagues—I hope all of us will insist that the Biden administration follow the law.

It used to be that Republicans and Democrats came together when an executive branch decision was made that intruded upon the legislative branches' lawmaking authority.

We need to get back to the days that, whether it is a Republican administration or a Democratic administration, if they are not following the law, they are not following what Congress has told them do, and we ought to all object. And we certainly ought to object to what the Biden administration is doing at the Department of Veterans Affairs to restrict the capabilities of people who are making choices—those who served our country who are making choices that this is in their best interest. And we don't need the Department overruling a choice about that decision.

I hope we will work together. I hope the Department of Veterans Affairs will change its ways. In the meantime, I am worried about veterans across Kansas and across the country whose decisions about their own well-being are undermined by those who decide something better is for them.

Let's let our veterans, who served our country, make a choice in consultation with their healthcare provider about what makes the most sense. Sometimes it is miles. Sometimes it is quality of care. But that choice, regardless, ought to be made by the veteran.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, today, I join my colleagues in outlining more than 3½ years of policy failures under President Biden, which are impacting families and businesses across the country every single day. From our economy to our Nation's security, Americans can feel the weight of this administration's decisions, leading to a higher cost of living and less safe communities—things that impact people every single day.

I will begin where individuals most frequently feel those impacts: their pocketbook. Biden's inflation is hurting every American, particularly low-income Americans. For example, Americans are paying more for energy because President Biden has sought to block or restrict access to our Nation's vast energy reserves.

On day one of his administration, President Biden blocked the Keystone

XL Pipeline and placed a moratorium on new oil and gas leases shortly thereafter.

Then, President Biden and congressional Democrats doubled down, passing a partisan tax-and-spend bill that included a new natural gas tax and higher fees and royalty rates on Federal energy production.

Just recently, the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management finalized a new public lands rule, enabling radical environmental groups to lock away more of our energy reserves under a so-called conservation leasing plan. The BLM also finalized a new on-shore oil and gas rule and a new venting and flaring rule.

In my State of North Dakota, BLM is proposing to close off leasing on 45 percent of Federal oil and gas acreage and 95 percent of Federal coal acreage. BLM's failed stewardship of our energy resources extends to other States as well, including the blocking of new oil and gas production in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

Each of these actions are specifically designed to drive up the cost of energy production on Federal lands, and these costs are ultimately passed along to consumers. Today, Americans are paying 46 percent more for gasoline at the pump. And, at the same time, utility bills are also rising and outpacing inflation.

The Environmental Protection Agency's latest onslaught of new power sector regulations will require utilities to spend billions of dollars to comply with burdensome regulations or, worse, force the premature retirement of reliable, coal-fired baseload powerplants that our Nation needs.

Independent grid operators from across the country are warning that EPA's regulations will threaten reliability and increase the risk of blackouts and brownouts.

Americans can no longer afford to pay more for less reliable energy following 3½ years of President Biden's failed Green New Deal.

That is why we need to take the handcuffs off our energy producers and empower them to increase supply and bring down prices for hard-working American families.

Now, in addition to discussing President Biden's failures on inflation, the economy, and energy production, I want to, again, bring the crisis taking place at the southern border to everyone's attention.

We are nearly through fiscal year 2024, and the consequences of President Biden's failed border policies are becoming clearer every single day. The American people are seeing beyond the administration's false claims that the border is secure. Every day, there are new reports of horrific crimes being committed by individuals illegally in the United States, and these violent crimes continue to be perpetuated in every State.

Local and Federal law enforcement officials have confirmed that the Tren

de Aragua—I may not have said it just right, but this is a transnational criminal gang that originated in a Venezuelan prison. I am going to repeat that. A transnational criminal gang that originated in a Venezuelan prison is now present and operating in the United States. Think about that. Their activities in the United States include human and drug trafficking as well as assaults and the murder of police officers.

In addition, there is now an increased threat from dangerous elements illegally entering the United States who have direct ties to international terrorist organizations like ISIS. Just last month, ICE arrested eight Tajikistan nationals with potential ties to ISIS, who illegally crossed the southern border and have been living in the United States. Now, let that sink in for a minute.

At our port of entry and all along the border, we continue to see high numbers of individuals on the Terror Watchlist who are attempting to enter the United States. So far, in fiscal year 2024, we have seen 316 individuals attempt to enter the country.

FBI Director Wray said it himself:

We are seeing a wide array of very dangerous threats that emanate from the border.

The cause of these threats to our homeland is clear: President Biden's failure to secure the southern border. President Biden's failure to secure the southern border.

The American people suffer the consequences because the Biden administration refuses to enforce policies that protect our southern border. These policies were put in place by the Trump administration. They are the Migrant Protection Protocols, or "Remain in Mexico" policy; enforcing third safe country agreements; and resuming construction of the border wall.

The Biden administration must address this border crisis, enforce the laws that kept monthly encounters to the lower numbers that we saw under the Trump administration, and take border security very seriously, deadly seriously, because border security is national security.

Altogether, all these issues—whether it is safety, whether it is inflation—all of these things affect Americans across this entire country every single day. After nearly 4 years of policy failures, our country needs to get back on the right track: bring down inflation, strengthen our economy, and address the border and national security and safety in our communities. That is exactly what my colleagues and I are working every day to accomplish.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, over the last 3½ years, President Biden's policies have unleashed a series of crises, one after another, and have thus made the lives of average Americans harder, not easier.