

The senior executive assistant clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

The Senator from Louisiana.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. CASSIDY. Madam President, Social Security is a sacred trust between the American people and our government. It is a promise to workers, many of whom have no other savings besides Social Security. A promise, almost by definition, does not change. It remains consistent despite new challenges. It is just a question of whether society has the courage to honor that commitment.

Now Social Security as we know it is headed for a fiscal cliff in 9 years. If it hits that cliff, if we do nothing and we just attempt to borrow our way out of it, there will be an estimated \$615 trillion in accumulated debt over the next 75 years—again, if we just attempt to borrow our way out of it. If we don't borrow our way out of it, there is a 20- to 24-percent cut in benefits to Social Security recipients, both current and future. This is the rock and the hard place: either the 20-percent or so cut or, with borrowing costs, a \$615 trillion addition to our Nation's deficit.

I have spoken before on Social Security. Today, I want to focus on two unfair provisions that we would eliminate if we actually have a chance to address Social Security, the larger picture. The two I will speak of are the windfall elimination provision and the government pension offset, also known as WEP and GPO. These penalize families across the country who worked in a State or a local public service job for part of their career and had a pension separate from Social Security.

How did we get here? WEP and GPO were introduced by President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich decades ago to address perceived inequalities in the Social Security system, but it had the effect actually of creating inequalities. When someone, say, worked for the State of Louisiana or the State of California, and then they didn't pay into the Social Security system, but they left that job after 20 years and went into the private sector, and they worked for 20 years paying into the Social Security system, getting their quotas, here, they were unfairly penalized, overly penalized for the years in which they did not contribute into Social Security.

What the windfall elimination provision does is it reduces the Social Security benefit of individuals who also receive a pension from non-Social-Security-covered employment—for example, State or local government. This has resulted in thousands of individuals who have paid into Social Security during their career but nonetheless received an overly reduced Social Security benefit when they retired.

This is WEP. Now let's talk about the government pension offset. The

GPO reduces Social Security spousal or survivor benefits for individuals who also receive a government pension. This provision can reduce or even eliminate Social Security benefits that a spouse or a widow might have expected and relied upon.

Louisiana has more first responders per capita than any other State in the Nation and tens of thousands of teachers, meaning that our State is disproportionately affected by WEP and GPO.

A few years ago, I met a retired Louisiana schoolteacher impacted by GPO—again, government pension offset. She had been a teacher. Her husband had paid into Social Security. She should have gotten the spousal benefit from Social Security, but it was remarkably reduced. She cried in my office. She was unable to understand why she was getting less in Social Security spousal benefits than if she had never worked at all. Think about that. If she had never taught, she would have gotten more benefits than the fact that she did teach and was subject to this government pension offset. She felt that she was punished for being a teacher, educating generations of Louisiana children. Indeed, she was, and she is.

There is no excuse to treat public servants this way. WEP and GPO should never have become laws, but we have an opportunity to fix them.

With President Biden stepping aside in the Presidential race, he has the opportunity to show Presidential leadership—the Presidential leadership he failed to demonstrate until now—on the issue of Social Security. If he is going to serve as President for several more months, why not support a bipartisan plan to save Social Security, to hold true to the promise to our seniors, as well as to make the system fair, with one of his last acts in office. The American people deserve a President willing to work for them. Here is an opportunity.

#### LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

Madam President, the American people understand the importance of energy: It keeps the lights on and puts food on the table. And living in Louisiana, you happen to know the person who works at the liquefied natural gas plant or at the oil rig, who produces the energy. He is your neighbor. That is why, with the Biden-Harris administration's pause upon LNG export permits in January, it was, to me, clear who they would be putting out of a job.

Last month, the American people gained a major victory. A U.S. district judge in Lake Charles ruled that the LNG pause was "completely without reason or logic." The court ruling reinstated sanity at a time when the Biden-Harris administration adopted the most absurd arguments to please radical environmental donors.

The fact of the matter is the Biden-Harris pause was a clear attempt to undermine U.S. liquefied natural gas production and export by putting the ki-

bosh on these new exports and depriving allies of freedom fuel.

Both President Biden and Vice President HARRIS have not been shy about their desire to kill American energy production. Vice President HARRIS has called for a total ban on fracking, adopting the "leave it in the ground" mentality of the far left, even going so far as to blow up the filibuster to pass the Green New Deal; that is, the now President of the Senate would have us end the filibuster to kill American energy, help China, Russia, and Iran, and raise prices on working families.

I don't know whether we should be more concerned about the fact that they say "leave it in the ground," despite knowing that renewable resources can't meet U.S. energy demand, or that they say it thinking that it may actually work.

Curtailed U.S. natural gas production will not lower global greenhouse gas emissions, but unleashing American energy will. U.S. liquefied natural gas is one of the cleanest burning fuels in the world in terms of lifecycle emissions. In fact, natural gas is principally responsible for U.S. emissions being lower today than they were in 1988, despite a much larger economy and population.

And just because we limit the supply of natural gas, the demand does not go away. The demand instead will turn to other sources of energy. We saw this in Europe after the invasion of Ukraine. European countries refused to buy Russian natural gas—and I applaud that decision—but with the Biden-Harris LNG export pause, the world must turn to dirty alternatives like oil or coal purchased from dictators or despots in Russia and Iran. It was as if Putin himself called up the Vice President, called up the President, and said: Let's put a pause on this because, by golly, this is going to help the Russian economy.

Now, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to know that, as coal use goes up, global emissions increase. The administration's thinly veiled plan to reduce global emissions actually backfires. It backfires because, if other countries don't get our natural gas, they burn their coal, and global emissions increase.

The administration's war on American energy didn't just affect our allies; it also wages a war on American workers. Two-thirds of U.S. liquefied natural gas is exported from Louisiana, providing thousands of Louisianians with good paying jobs. The Biden-Harris freeze impacted 18 LNG export facilities, 12 of which were going to be built in my State.

Now, "to be built" is the key phrase here, because it didn't just affect energy jobs; it affected construction jobs as well. Because the Biden-Harris administration wants to appease the rich climate lobby, the future and financial security of construction workers in Louisiana and across the country is thrown into limbo.

Now, even though we have this court ruling, we are not out of the woods.

The Federal court's ruling brought common sense back, but the Department of Energy can still slow-walk permits, and this is something Congress must watch closely. This is something Congress is already looking to address, with bipartisan support for setting a time limit on how long the Department of Energy can take to review new permits—a shot clock, if you will.

When we unleash American energy production and LNG exports, it creates high-paying jobs, it boosts our economy, and it strengthens the United States and the national security of allies. It denies income to Putin and drives down global greenhouse gas emissions. These should all be bipartisan goals.

Common sense prevailed in the courts. Now it is time for common sense to return to the White House.

#### NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

Madam President, the National Flood Insurance Program, or NFIP, was created to protect Americans and their families. It covers 4.7 million American homes. But NFIP fails to serve that core function when it becomes too expensive to afford.

This is my poster: Make flood insurance affordable.

FEMA's new risk assessment, Risk Rating 2.0, has blindsided homeowners with unprecedented spikes in their insurance premiums, and it was never passed by Congress.

I speak to constituents constantly about flood insurance. A few months ago, I shared several stories that my team and I have heard from people in Louisiana about the issue. And their stories matter. They are the stories of Americans struggling to get by, and they deserve to be heard. So I am back to share a couple more.

One resident in New Orleans, nearing retirement, told us she was struggling to keep up with rising premiums because they no longer allow her home to be grandfathered into the program. Her house was built in 1987, up to the standards under the flood map at the time. She did everything right.

Her home flooded during Katrina, like so many did, but, again, it was saved from skyrocketing premiums until Risk Rating 2.0. And it is important to note that the flooding during Katrina was due to the failure of federally designed and built flood walls. So she is being blamed for the Army Corps of Engineers' failure, and, therefore, now she has got skyrocketing premiums.

She tells us that her future premiums will eventually rise to over \$8,000. Her hazard insurance is almost \$12,000 and growing each year. She wrote:

There is no way I will be able to retire and afford the premiums. I can hardly pay them now. There is no way I will be able to retire.

Her story is one that is shared by many homeowners in our State. There is another woman in the city of Central, LA, just outside of Baton Rouge, an area that doesn't often flood. As she

put it, in order for her house to flood, the whole city of Central would need to be under water.

But when Risk Rating 2.0 hit, she learned her premiums would quadruple if she opted for the coverage she wanted. So, instead, she dropped coverage altogether.

Now that is the problem with blindsiding people with higher premiums. If they don't flood and they cannot afford insurance, they drop their coverage. When that happens, the pool of policyholders shrinks, and the risk is put on fewer and fewer policyholders, which raises their premiums even more, and you enter what is called an actuarial death spiral.

FEMA itself forecasted that over 20 percent of stakeholders would leave the program within 10 years with these increased premiums. We are setting the program up for collapse.

And, by the way, these are not wealthy people. The wealthy are like a small minority of those affected. There is a stereotype that this is for wealthy people with their camps at the beach. No, this program is for working and middle-income Americans, the kind of folks who wake up every day, go to the refinery, make the gasoline and the jet fuel that help us get here, and do the work that literally powers our economy. And they are the ones that are affected.

Madam President, 62 percent of all NFIP policies are in parishes and counties where the median household income is below the national average of about \$54,000. These are hard-working families, not millionaires' beach homes.

And it is not just Louisiana families getting hit. We have seen flooding in States that don't typically make you think of flooding.

So if it is the dark yellow, it is a State that has had over a billion dollars in claims. That includes the President of the Senate's home State of California, her native State of Mississippi, and all of these other beach States, including a non-beach State, which would be the State of Missouri.

So the yellow which is not as dark is, again, places which have had over \$50 million in NFIP claims. So you see this is a pervasive problem.

This is a national program. Forty-four States have had over \$50 million in total NFIP claims, and every single State has had at least \$5 million in claims.

You may be surprised to hear that Ruidoso, NM, a small village in South Central New Mexico, has faced 13 flash flood emergencies since June 19 of this year due to runoff from heavy rain.

On July 17, homeowners in Nashville, IL, were devastated when the town's dam flooded and caused damages to dozens of homes.

On May 24, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte issued an executive order to declare a statewide disaster in response to recent flooding in Northern and Central Montana.

Residents of Appleton, WI, faced widespread damage from a flash flood earlier this year.

New Mexico, Illinois, Montana, Wisconsin—not places you typically think of when you think of flooding. Again, it is a national issue, not just a coastal issue.

Now, let me say to my colleagues who represent those States and all of my colleagues that come to talk to me about it: Let's have a conversation. Every single Member of this body has constituents who depend upon the National Flood Insurance Program. My team is working on a bipartisan solution that will roll back Risk Rating 2.0 and make flood insurance affordable and accountable again. Let's find a way forward.

#### VENEZUELA

Madam President, for 25 years, the Venezuelan people have suffered. They have endured the Chavez-Maduro despotic regimes—regimes that stole their money, ruined their country's infrastructure, destroyed public services, tortured their politicians, and tried to destabilize the entire region.

One little factoid: At one point, Venezuela had the third richest economy in the Western Hemisphere per capita, and now their per capita income is that of Haiti. They have gone from third to being the worst.

But Venezuela's freedom-loving citizens kept fighting. Yesterday, again, they went out to vote for freedom in a movement led by Maria Corina Machado, the opposition leader who was herself barred from running, and Edmundo Gonzalez, the opposition's candidate. The result was an overwhelming—overwhelming—win for the opposition and for democracy.

And here is Maria, and here is Edmundo.

Multiple exit polls and quick counts show the opposition winning by more than 30 percent. Edmundo Gonzalez won with the largest landslide in Venezuelan history. This landslide win comes despite the regime's efforts that barred the vast majority of the 8 million Venezuelan exiles from voting. The real electoral numbers were so bad that the regime simply stopped counting votes and made up numbers.

Now, Venezuelans obviously want change, and the regime does not. They are desperately holding on to whatever power they can grab. This is a critical moment in our hemisphere. Do they have to wait with another 25 years of tyranny and repression when they are just 3 hours from the United States? Do we, the United States, allow the Russians, the Chinese Communist Party, the drug cartels, Iran, and others to use Venezuela as ground zero in their plans to harm the United States and our allies in the hemisphere? Do we allow Venezuela's collapse to eventually flood the United States with refugees?

We need to change course. It starts by recognizing President-elect Edmundo Gonzalez. It starts with an