

Look, these problems spill over from the sanctuary cities like those in Colorado, and they hit neighboring States like my home State of Wyoming.

In Laramie County, WY, law enforcement officials say that the number of illegal immigrants in their jails has more than doubled. One of those jailed illegal immigrants is a suspected member of that violent Venezuelan gang that took over the apartment complex in Colorado—a gang that has been described as “MS-13 on steroids.”

Make no mistake, Vice President HARRIS is complicit in all of this border disaster.

Now—just, I think, today—Vice President HARRIS says she wants to secure the border. New language for her. Well, let me tell you, she hasn't done it yet. For the past 4 years, KAMALA HARRIS has been the second most powerful person in the world, and she was appointed by the President to be the border czar. He said she knew how. He had full confidence in her; she knew how to handle the problem. Well, as the border czar, she had the power to secure the southern border and has that power still today. Not doing it.

So let me ask again: Why hasn't it been done? Let me tell you why. Like Joe Biden, Vice President HARRIS wants to smooth the flow of illegal immigrants. Doesn't want to stop it—oh, no. Doesn't want to stop it; wants to smooth the flow. This is an extreme position and out of touch with the American people.

Like Joe Biden, KAMALA HARRIS opposes the border wall. She actually called the wall a “stupid waste of money.” That is what we hear from the Vice President of the United States. That is an extreme position compared to what the American people would like to see happen today.

KAMALA HARRIS also said that building the wall to prevent terrorists from entering the country was the “height of irresponsibility.”

“[T]he height of irresponsibility” to try to keep terrorists out of the country. Nope. Come on in, she wants.

This again—KAMALA HARRIS. San Francisco liberal. Extreme position.

Remember, terror suspects are exploiting our vulnerability. The number of terror suspects that we have caught crossing the border has risen by 3,000 percent since Joe Biden and KAMALA HARRIS took over the Presidency and the Vice Presidency.

This administration promises amnesty for illegal immigrants. This is an invitation. They are inviting millions upon millions of illegal immigrants into this country. This is an extreme position compared to what the American people want and expect from their elected officials.

What we are seeing across the country are KAMALA HARRIS, Democrats across the board, and sanctuary cities providing free healthcare for illegal immigrants—another extreme position of the Democrats in the White House.

They demand that our hard-earned taxpayer dollars pay for free housing,

free preloaded debit cards, and free cell phones for illegal immigrants. The American public hates this. This is their taxpayer dollars. Democrats' open border policies have cost the taxpayers plenty. The numbers are jaw-dropping—\$451 billion so far—and the number keeps going up.

Like President Biden, KAMALA HARRIS wants to stop deporting criminals who are here in this country illegally. She wants to stop it. In the past, she said illegal immigration should not be a crime. Well, once again, she is out of touch with the American people. That is an extreme position.

This is the truth: KAMALA HARRIS's policies are no different than the dangerous, disastrous, deadly policies of President Joe Biden's, who signed 49 Executive orders in his first 100 days in office.

This is the problem that our country faces today: Joe Biden and KAMALA HARRIS threw open the borders, and 10 million illegal immigrants have come on through.

When this administration stopped building the wall and ended “Remain in Mexico,” Vice President HARRIS was right there, cheering on Joe Biden. When Joe Biden brought back the failed policy of catch-and-release, Vice President HARRIS had his back. When Joe Biden wanted to send stimulus checks to illegal immigrants, what happened? KAMALA HARRIS came into this Chamber; sat in that chair; and cast the tie-breaking vote for this radical and reckless policy of sending stimulus checks to illegal immigrants—just giving them more and more free stuff funded by the American taxpayers.

To add insult to injury, KAMALA HARRIS has actually said, then: Well, the border is secure. Nobody believes that. I don't even think she believes it. She should know better. If she does not, that should disqualify her from being a candidate for President or for being President.

On September 22, Vice President HARRIS claimed we have a secure border. Who is she listening to? Why didn't she go and look for herself? Three days earlier, the illegal immigrant who murdered Laken Riley entered our country.

It is time to close the book on Joe Biden and KAMALA HARRIS and their dangerous border policies. It is time for us to get serious about securing the border and making our communities safer.

Senate Republicans have real solutions. It is to finish the wall; it is to end catch-and-release; it is to restore the “Remain in Mexico” policy—a policy that worked. Our solution also includes deporting illegal immigrants and stopping illegal immigrants from voting in our elections.

So I return to the question I asked at the beginning: If KAMALA HARRIS wants to secure the border, why hasn't she done so yet?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

#### GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, here is a number for everyone to think about today: \$35.3 trillion—\$35.3 trillion. That is our Nation's debt number. As you can see, we have gotten there because of years of deficit spending.

Right now, this massive sum, which is our national debt, represents more than \$100,000 of indebtedness for every man, woman, and child in this country. While this number is almost impossible to comprehend, it poses one of the greatest threats to our Nation's stability, security, and survival.

To put this issue in perspective, our debt-to-GDP ratio is 121 percent, meaning our Nation's debt is one-fifth larger than our Nation's annual economic output. Think about that. The debt is larger than our output. By comparison, our debt-to-GDP ratio at the end of World War II was 106 percent. That was the record high before we got to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As our debt balloons, the annual cost of interest payments on the debt continues to rise, and this crowds out vital services that ought to be going to people who need them. In fact, through the first 6 months of fiscal year 2024, our country spent more taxpayer money servicing the debt than we spent on our military. We spent \$440 billion on interest payments on our debt. When faced with this reality, Tennesseans and Americans will probably wonder: Well, how did we get on this path to fiscal disaster?

Of course, \$35.3 trillion in debt didn't just appear overnight. Each year, the Federal deficit—and I have got a chart here that goes back to 2005 and shows you what the deficit was every year—which is the annual difference between government spending and taxpayer money that is collected and coming into the Federal Government, all gets tacked on to our national debt, and under the Biden-Harris administration, this deficit spending has exploded.

You can see these numbers. Last fiscal year, the Federal deficit was nearly \$1.7 trillion. It was up more than 21 percent from \$1.4 trillion in 2022. If you will recall, the Biden-Harris's Inflation Reduction Act—the Green New Deal giveaway that Vice President HARRIS sat right up there and cast the tie-breaking vote for—was supposed to somehow, miraculously, reduce the debt.

Still, so many Tennesseans say: How can you say you are going to spend more and that is going to reduce what you spend? It is void of common sense.

In fiscal year 2021, meanwhile, the Federal deficit reached more than \$2.7 trillion. Now, we know some of that overlapped with the final couple of months of the Trump administration, but the spending occurred primarily under the Biden administration and under that \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan. It was the driving force of this administration's four-decade-high inflation rate.

Indeed, if you go back and you look at inflation, it was 1.4 percent the day that President Biden and Vice President HARRIS took office. Today, the latest number is 20.3 percent. In fact, excluding the emergency COVID spending in 2020, deficit spending under the Biden-Harris administration is at its highest point in American history—as I said, 121 percent of GDP. Previously, after World War II, it was at 106 percent.

The only other administration that has come even close to these numbers under Biden-Harris is the Obama-Biden administration. Before congressional Republicans fought for and secured serious spending cuts, that administration ran annual deficits as high as \$1.4 trillion between fiscal years 2009 and 2012.

With the deficit soaring again, our country needs another serious course correction. Yet, under their 2025 budget proposal, the Biden-Harris administration has called for—and I want you to get this number. Their 2025 budget proposal calls for \$86 trillion in spending over the next 10 years—\$86 trillion. It would increase our national debt—that \$35.3 trillion number—it would increase it by \$18 trillion.

Now, bear in mind, this is spending they are putting on the books. They are claiming it. They are out here shouting for it. Bidenomics, it is working. But, again, we look at this and say: How can you spend more and then say you are reducing the deficit? It is void of common sense.

Instead of fiscal recklessness, our country needs fiscal responsibility. Every year, I have legislation that would slash Federal spending—and I do these bills every year—by 1 percent, 2 percent, 5 percent for discretionary spending, excluding Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs. I fully believe anybody can find a way to save one penny, two pennies, or a nickel out of what they are given to spend.

At a time when growth in government hiring is now outpacing growth in private sector hiring, Congress must also address the ballooning size of the Federal Government, which now employs nearly 2.4 million bureaucrats. It is time to start freezing salaries and freezing Federal hiring.

While there are many more steps that need to be taken to put America on a better fiscal trajectory, these moves would begin to tackle the threat that is posed to our Nation and to our freedoms because of overspending. If we don't get busy with this and find some ways to wrestle with this debt and with this out-of-control spending, it is our children and grandchildren who will suffer by having to pay that bill.

#### COUNTRY MUSIC MONTH

Mr. President, each year since 1961, the Country Music Association has inducted the legendary performers, songwriters, and artists of this uniquely American musical tradition into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

In many ways, this distinction is the highest honor in country music, with names like Hank Williams, Chet Atkins, Dolly Parton, and Elvis Presley among its roll of honor. Next month, three new names will join this legendary group during the Hall of Fame Medallion Ceremony: John Anderson, a force for traditionalism in country music, who achieved 20 Top Ten country singles across a five-decades-long career; James Burton, who is considered one of the greatest guitarists in all of music, performing and recording with the likes of Elvis, Merle Haggard, John Denver, and Emmylou Harris; and the late Toby Keith, an exceptional storyteller who brought joy to millions around the world through his music, especially to our men and women in uniform.

While each artist has their own distinct sound and style, they share a music tradition that reminds every American of the things that truly matter: faith, family, freedom, hope, opportunity, and patriotism.

To honor this incredible genre, this week I am introducing a resolution that would designate October 2024 as Country Music Month.

There is a reason the Grand Ole Opry—the most famous stage in country music—is known as the home of American music. Now is the perfect time for Congress to honor the contributions of country music and its legendary performers and artists to the story and the history of the United States.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### NOMINATION OF MICHAEL SFRAGA

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I have come to the floor this morning to speak about the nomination of Dr. Michael Sfraga. He is an Alaskan, and he has been nominated to be our Nation's very first Ambassador at Large for the Arctic.

We are going to have this vote very shortly, and my hope is that colleagues will see not only the imperative for an Arctic Ambassador at this moment in time but also to recognize that this nominee, Dr. Sfraga, is absolutely impeccable in terms of his qualifications for this position.

He is one who is known widely throughout Arctic circles as our Arctic expert and the expert in everything from research to policy, to national security.

We are the only Arctic Nation that lacks an Arctic Ambassador. I think colleagues are at that point in time where they recognize it is past time that we have that representation in the room when issues are as contentious as they are.

Let me just share with you a few reminders about what is happening in the Far North. We were all made aware, on July 24, when Russian and Chinese bombers flew a joint patrol for the first time off the coast of Alaska. What was unusual was not the fact that Russia and China were flying together, but it was the fact that it was the first time they had done it jointly in the Arctic.

We see the Russians regularly fly into our air defense identification zone—or ADIZ—but this was the first time to see the Chinese flying in this area with a joint mission. And we have just seen events continue to unfold throughout the summer.

Just a couple of weeks ago, September 10, Russia began a massive, weeklong, worldwide “Ocean-24” exercise with hundreds of warships, more than 100 aircraft, and nearly 100,000 troops. This exercise is the largest since the fall of the Soviet Union, but it also had Chinese participation.

Between its start and end, NORAD and the air forces stationed in Alaska detected, tracked, and intercepted four different Russian incursions into our Alaska ADIZ.

So we have come to expect incursions throughout the year, usually about six or seven. Think about that. In just 5 days, our air defenses were tested as much as they tend to be tested in any given year. So we are now way ahead on publicly reported intercepts this year, up to 10. We have got 3 months left.

There has also been an unprecedented level of naval activity off the coast. We saw the U.S. Coast Guard detect four Russian naval vessels 50 miles northwest of Point Hope. Just take it back a couple of years when Russian warships chased Alaska fishermen out of an area within our EEZ. That was back in August of 2020. Those are not isolated incidents either.

Last August, the Coast Guard detected and shadowed a Russian intelligence ship operating off of the Aleutians. This July, the Coast Guard detected and shadowed a Chinese surface action group within our EEZ and the Bering Sea.

We all remember the Chinese surveillance balloons that transited above Alaska and the Arctic last year.

And then just last night, I received notification from NORTHCOM of yet further intercepts of four Russian aircraft.

I hope that we can all agree that this is an unprecedented time for the region. Normally, we think of the Arctic as “High North, Low Tension,” but right now it is “High North,” and it is “Rising Tension.”

One thing that is missing is a Senate-confirmed diplomat who will spend his or her time focused on Arctic issues, working with our allies, engaging our adversaries, and sending these very clear messages that we will protect America's interest in the Arctic.

I had a chance to talk to Dr. Sfraga just literally hours ago. We were talking about this very intercept and what