

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

LAKEN RILEY ACT

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the Cabinet confirmation process is well underway here in the U.S. Senate. Confirmation hearings began this week with Defense Secretary nominee Pete Hegseth in the Armed Services Committee on Tuesday. Yesterday, we had six confirmation hearings—the most confirmation hearings, I might add, in a single day since 2001—and we have more happening today and tomorrow. By the time President Trump takes the oath of office on Monday, the Senate will have held hearings for 12 of his nominees, and there are plenty more to come.

Once the committees complete their work, the process will move to the floor, and we will move as quickly as possible on those votes. I hope Democrats will provide a level of cooperation that will allow us to quickly fill these positions so these nominees can begin their work for the American people.

One of the nominees being considered this week is a familiar face to us in the Senate. Yesterday, our longtime colleague Senator RUBIO found himself on the other side of the dais in the Foreign Relations Committee for his hearing to be Secretary of State. Members of that committee are well acquainted with Senator RUBIO's expertise in foreign policy. He has been a leading voice on these issues here in the Senate and on the Foreign Relations Committee since he arrived here in 2011, and yesterday, his expertise was on full display. Whether he was discussing China, the Middle East, Russia, our alliances, or anything else, our colleague demonstrated his command of international affairs.

MARCO also clearly laid out the philosophy he will bring to the job. He spoke about peace through strength, restoring American leadership, and advancing America's interests.

Our colleague is ready to step into the leadership void that the Biden administration has too often left on the world stage. In too many instances, the Biden administration has chosen to appease our enemies rather than demonstrate strength.

As yesterday made clear, we can expect Senator RUBIO to bring a moral clarity to foreign policy that has been sorely lacking in the last 4 years. That is important—moral clarity—and it has never been a challenge for MARCO RUBIO.

Take our relationship with China. The senior Senator from Florida has been a leading voice on the Chinese Communist Party's malign intentions and their implications for the United States. He has been clear-eyed about what the United States ought to do to outcompete China in this century, and

he has been outspoken in calling attention to China's human rights abuses. He was a leading voice on China's repression of its own people in Xinjiang, and he led the charge on the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act in the U.S. Senate. And he didn't stop once it became law; he made sure the legislation was being implemented properly. He called out companies suspected of using forced labor, and he advocated for the Biden administration to do a better job of vetting imports.

All of us here in the Senate know of MARCO's unwavering commitment to freedom. He has been a strong supporter of freedom fighters in Hong Kong, and he has been outspoken in his support for Taiwan as the Chinese Communist Party has grown more aggressive.

He is also a fierce defender of democracy and human rights in Latin America. His family watched their native Cuba deteriorate under a communist dictatorship, and it was conversations with his grandfather about Cuba's plight that drew Senator RUBIO into public service. So it is no surprise he is one of the strongest defenders of the rights of the Cuban people.

He is also a strong voice for democracy and justice in Venezuela. MARCO has been outspoken in his criticism of the Biden administration's appeasement of the Maduro regime, and he was a clear voice in defense of democracy as the country suffered through Maduro's corrupt election last year.

As we heard in his testimony yesterday, our colleague is focused on advancing America's interests. As he said, "Every dollar we spend, every program we fund, and every policy we pursue must be justified by the answer to three simple questions: Does it make America safer? Does it make America stronger or does it make America more prosperous?" I think that is what the American people should expect from a Secretary of State and from their government, and anybody who watched his hearing yesterday knows that is what we are going to get from MARCO RUBIO as Secretary of State.

I will have more to say about MARCO and other nominees for the Trump administration as they move through the process here in the U.S. Senate, and I look forward to hearing from each of the President's nominees in the near future.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

PRESIDENT BIDEN'S FAREWELL ADDRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, last night, President Biden delivered his

farewell address, reflecting on his 4 years in office, which will be remembered as one of the most productive periods in modern American history. Working alongside President Biden for the American people was the honor of a lifetime.

When President Biden took office, America was in crisis. The pandemic was surging. The economy was reeling. Our democracy was under assault. But President Biden, with good help from Senate Democrats, got right to work, and together, I am proud that we achieved one of the most ambitious legislative agendas in decades.

Working with President Biden, we created nearly 17 million new jobs, the most in a single term. We passed historic legislation, like Chips and Science—that was a baby that I nurtured—the bipartisan infrastructure law, and the Inflation Reduction Act. We lowered the cost of prescription drugs for tens of millions of Americans. We passed the first gun safety law in 30 years. We enshrined marriage equality into law. We confirmed 235 well-qualified and historic judges to lifetime appointments—more judges than any majority has confirmed in decades—and so much more.

President Biden also left America with a somber warning in his address—one that every American should listen to. He cautioned that "an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power, and influence" that will threaten all the progress our country has made in the last 4 years.

President Biden is right. An oligarchy is beginning to take shape in America, and you can see it by looking at the incoming Trump administration.

Donald Trump has not even taken office yet, but many of his top advisers and Cabinet picks are extremely wealthy people with deep ties to corporate special interests. Many of these Cabinet picks seem to see the world through the eyes of a very rich and privileged individual—a very limited vision indeed. And the agenda they are pushing—tax cuts for the ultrawealthy and draconian cuts to the working class—is narrow and only furthers inequality in America.

Donald Trump's agenda would precisely benefit the oligarchy class that President Biden is warning about. The progress we have made under President Biden's leadership—lower taxes for families, more affordable healthcare, investments in infrastructure and energy—should not be undone only to assuage the desires of a limited few.

We Democrats will continue the legacy that President Biden created, continue fighting for working families, and make sure that everyone in America—not just the uberwealthy—has a fair shot.

TIKTOK

Mr. President, now on TikTok, the 170 million Americans who use TikTok are rightfully asking the same question: What will happen to the app after the ban enters into effect next week?

Today, I want to say a few words about protecting TikTok's future while also protecting America's national security at the same time.

We aren't against TikTok. We want TikTok to keep going. But we are against a Chinese company that is in cahoots with the Chinese Communist Party owning TikTok. Unfortunately, TikTok, as it exists today, has too many security risks that cannot be ignored. The law passed last year was intended to sever TikTok from the influence of the CCP while keeping the app available for Americans.

It is clear that more time is needed to find an American buyer and not disrupt the lives and livelihoods of millions of Americans, of so many influencers who have built up a good network of followers. That is why, last night, Senate Democrats tried to pass a bill that would extend the deadline to give everyone more time to come up with a workable solution, but Senate Republicans blocked our bill, which is stunning because time is running short.

We will continue to work to find a responsible solution to keeping TikTok going, protect American livelihoods, and protect against Chinese Communist Party surveillance. We must and can do all three. I have made my views clear to the current administration, and I will work with the Trump administration and with both parties to keep TikTok alive while protecting our national security.

We can all agree that we must protect Americans' privacy from the prying eyes of the Chinese Communist Party, but we also should agree it must be done in the right way, without risking content creators' livelihoods by rushing this process in a premature way. TikTok should survive but under new ownership.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, this week, the American people have gotten their first real look at what is in store for them under a second Trump administration, and it is very bad news for the working and middle class. Senate Republicans, of course, are in the majority. They control, to a large extent, the final outcome of each nominee in this Chamber if they stick together. And Donald Trump's hold on Senate Republicans, as we have seen throughout the nominations process, is very, very strong.

Even so, there are two reasons why holding these hearings is extremely important regardless of outcome. First, they create a contrast between the parties. People will see what we stand for and what our Republican colleagues stand for as they support Trump's nominees. And second, the hearings create a record to hold these nominees accountable should they fail on the job down the line—which, unfortunately, I think many will, given their meager qualifications.

The contrast between whom Democrats will fight for and whom Repub-

licans will fight for is becoming exceedingly obvious, thanks to these hearings. On the Democratic side, we want answers to the things Americans are worried most about: What does Donald Trump's agenda mean for jobs, for inflation? What are Trump's tariffs going to do to people's bottom lines? Will it send prices shooting up?

And people are going to ask: Are my prescription drugs going to get more expensive? They are going to ask: Will our broken tax system become even more unfair under President Trump in a way that rigs the system for the ultrawealthy? These are the questions Americans care about. These are the things Democrats want answers to from President Trump's nominees. And in many cases, the answers are very, very troubling.

Second, even if these nominees are confirmed in the end, given that Donald Trump's hold on Senate Republicans is so absolute, the American people deserve to have a record they can reference down the line.

Candidly, many of President Trump's nominees are not fit for the job. Look at Pete Hegseth. Confirming some of these people would be a reckless roll of the dice for our country, but Republicans, under pressure from President-elect Trump, seem willing to press ahead nonetheless.

Should the time come that some of these nominees fail on the job, the hearings we are holding right now will come back to haunt our Republican colleagues because the warnings will have been there from the start. By asking tough questions, by getting nominees on the record, by establishing that many of these individuals are unfit, these hearings will have been the canary in the coal mine that warns everyone that some of these nominees are too great a risk.

So Democrats will continue to uphold our responsibility to scrutinize each nominee on the issues Americans care about. We will continue asking the tough questions because working people deserve to know whose side Donald Trump is truly on. Is it working people, like Donald Trump claims, or is it corporate special interests like his nominations all too often suggest?

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. 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 Kentucky.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, earlier this week, President Biden went to the State Department and offered a final assessment of his record on foreign policy. He insisted that his leadership had "increased America's power in every dimension," that we were

"stronger at home, stronger in the world, and . . . more capable . . . than we have been in a long time."

I suspect the only people who buy that assessment were right there in the room with the President. No doubt, those watching from further afield found those remarks unconvincing. What most of us saw was a final rear-guard action to cover for an administration that has been in retreat for 4 straight years.

The President's tough talk about Putin is undone by his chronic and well-documented fear of escalation—the hesitation and half measures that kept critical tools out of Ukrainian hands when they could have made a difference. Even his most senior aides inadvertently acknowledged the truth. In a legacy-shopping column in the New York Times, Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin say it was "steadfast American leadership" that rallied the world to "help Ukraine survive the Kremlin's imperial onslaught."

To help Ukraine survive. Not to help defeat aggression, not to help restore sovereignty, not to help degrade the power of a major adversary—just to let Ukraine's resistance languish on the slow drip of critical capabilities moving far slower than the speed of relevance.

Or take this administration's approach to the Middle East. On Monday, the President was optimistic about the prospects of defeating Iran's terror proxies and restoring credible deterrence under which Israel and its neighbors could live in peace. But absent entirely was any recognition that it was Israel, not the United States, that has created this geopolitical opportunity.

And no recognition that Israel has done so in spite of the administration's best efforts to restrain a sovereign ally's self-defense. In the 468 days since the horrors of October 7, the President's public scolding of a close ally under attack and refusal to check the growing anti-Israel streak poisoning his party have exposed his ironclad commitment to Israel as something of a hollow gesture.

This, after a disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan had given allies and partners enough reason to doubt the strength of America's word—and his administration's competence.

And behind President Biden's bluster about "winning the worldwide competition" with China is a record of paltry investment in the hard power America needs to meet aggression and to reassure our allies.

For 4 straight years, he submitted defense budget requests that failed to even keep pace with inflation, let alone the pacing threat of the PRC.

While America's primary long-term strategic competitor extended its lead in developing and producing lethal capabilities, the Biden administration focused on climate diplomacy. And its signature climate protectionism picked avoidable trade fights with allies and

partners we will need to deter or defeat Chinese aggression.

In light of the PRC's headway and closer alignment with other adversaries, America's warfighters are no better equipped today to deter and defeat aggression than we were 4 years ago and no more certain that the institutions designed to support them actually have their backs.

And from Europe to the Middle East to the Taiwan Strait, the forces that wish harm to America, to our people, to our values, to our interests, and to our allies have seized an opportunity.

On Monday, President Biden's foreign policy will end, and a new Commander in Chief will have to contend with his staggering failures. A new administration will have to clean up the mess their predecessors made of American power and American credibility.

It is no secret that the incoming national security team will take a distinctly different approach. The President-elect has expressed repeatedly his intention to reorient American national security decision making around a simple guiding principle: peace through strength. And he would be right to do so.

His administration's work must begin with restoring American hard power and bolstering our deterrent. The world they will inherit is more dangerous and more hostile to U.S. security interests than the one he left to President Biden 4 years ago.

The free world is less likely to trust our commitments, and the authoritarians convening against us are more likely to scoff at our threats. Russia, Iran, North Korea, and the PRC are finding more and more that the desire to weaken the United States and undermine the order we lead is a shared objective and one toward which they are now working together in coordination to weaken the United States.

As I have counseled the President-elect already, we cannot afford to discount this coordination. No matter how loudly others press him to embrace retreat and retrenchment, America cannot address grave threats to our interests a la carte. And as I have said repeatedly, there is no language these adversaries understand more clearly than strength.

There is no surer way to restore meaningful deterrence against them than by investing in our capacity and proving our willingness to impose devastating costs.

It is common to refer to today's challenges as the gravest America has faced since World War II, but we certainly don't invest like we believe that is the case.

So here is a good way of looking at it: Beating the axis in World War II meant spending 37 percent of our GDP on defense; in the Korean War, it took nearly 14 percent; the height of Vietnam, 9 percent; the Reagan buildup at 6 percent. Today we are spending 3 percent of GDP on the arsenal of democracy.

Peace through strength must be more than a pithy phrase—vaguely tough-sounding but functionally benign. It must instead stand for a clear and measurable commitment to rebuild the arsenal of democracy and the most lethal fighting forces in the world.

As chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I take the President-elect's commitments very seriously, and I know he knows that deterring a war is cheaper than fighting one. And I stand ready to work closely with this administration in the current urgent work ahead, rebuilding the capabilities and capacity we need in order to credibly pursue peace through strength.

That work, of course, begins with assembling an experienced and well-qualified team. The incoming administration is right to expect swift consideration of Cabinet nominations and broad deference on the confirmation of nominees whose credentials and records prove them worthy of the highest public trust and whose policy views align with the administration's goal.

Nominees whose professional experience is commensurate with the responsibilities of the office and who have demonstrated in detail their command of relevant policy will certainly have my vote. I intend to support a large slate of nominees who satisfy these conditions. In particular, I will vote to confirm nominees to senior national security roles whose record and experience will make them immediate assets, not liabilities, in the pursuit of peace through strength.

Our chance to turn the page on the damage of the Biden administration's record simply cannot come soon enough.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGERTY). The majority whip.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today having been in a number of hearings involving President Trump's nominees overseeing American energy dominance. I tell you, President Trump's energy nominees show that this administration that is coming in, the Trump-Vance administration, is serious about unleashing affordable, available, reliable American energy.

Doug Burgum is President Trump's nominee to be Secretary of the Department of the Interior. He is still testifying right now in the Energy Committee. He is the son of North Dakota, and his roots run deep in the West.

Chris Wright, who had his hearing yesterday, is President Trump's nominee to be the Secretary of Energy. His data-driven leadership and creativity laid the foundation for the fracking boom that we experienced in this Nation that has fueled American energy independence.

And Lee Zeldin, whom I had the privilege of introducing earlier this morning at the EPW Committee, well, he is a nominee to be the Administrator of the Environmental Protection

Agency. He is a lawyer; he is a veteran; and he is a former star Member of the House of Representatives. He is going to cut redtape. He is going to balance environmental stewardship with sensible energy production.

All three of these nominees are excellent choices to carry out President Trump's "all of the above" energy strategy. They all have my vote.

Like most Americans, President Trump and his nominees understand that energy policy is the foundation of our Nation's future and our success. It is linked directly to the prices that we pay, to the technology that we create, and to the world in which we live.

Unleashing American energy means lower prices, means more innovation at home, and it means more safety and security for our citizens.

Well, we have seen it before. Affordable, reliable energy was the rocket fuel for American security and prosperity, and we saw it during the first Trump administration. But over the last 4 years, Democrats restricted and regulated and tried to reduce American energy production, instead of unlocking its full potential. Their America-last energy strategy policies led to painfully high prices and a more vulnerable nation. I think energy was on the ballot this year, and energy won.

Fortunately, President Trump is placing a premium on energy production. He is already laying the groundwork to take the handcuffs off of American energy production. On day one, I expect the President is going to sign a blizzard of Executive orders to bring back American energy dominance. First day priorities include ending the Democrats' electric vehicle mandate, more drilling on Federal lands, and resuming exports of U.S. liquefied natural gas.

This is certainly good news for my home State of Wyoming. Wyoming is America's energy breadbasket. Oil and gas is our bread and butter. We have world-class reserves of coal. We have world-class wind. We have benefited from American energy dominance, and our Wyoming tough energy workers made it all possible. Wyoming energy workers now stand ready to unleash American energy once again.

I hear my colleagues on the other side of the aisle preach doom and gloom about energy independence. The Democrat leader here on the floor said yesterday Chris Wright, who is the President's nominee for the Secretary of Energy—he called this nominee an energy extremist. Why? Because Chris Wright believes "oil and gas make the world go round." Well, it does.

This is the depth of the Democrats' climate delusion. Oil and gas drive our economy, produce great jobs, and produce our prosperity. And because of American oil and gas, we do it cleaner; we do it safer; and we do it more reliably than anywhere else on planet Earth.

The facts could not be clearer. Since 2005, America has been responsible for

66 percent of emission reduction among developed countries. We do it better than anyone else in the world. We have reduced more emissions than the next six countries combined.

There is a reason why, and it is not because Joe Biden bribed Americans to buy solar panels or buy electric cars. No, it is American energy production, American energy dominance. It is because we unleashed affordable, available, reliable American energy. For the record, we can thank Chris Wright and the fracking boom for unleashing a lot of that energy.

In 2019, America became energy independent for the first time in 50 years. Why? How did it happen? President Trump did it. With Doug Burgum, Chris Wright, and Lee Zeldin on America's team, we are going to do it again.

(The remarks of Mr. BARRASSO pertaining to the submission of S. 140 are printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mr. BARRASSO. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it is 4 days until President Trump will be inaugurated for the second time as President of the United States. That means we only have 4 more days of President Biden's absentee leadership, but he seems to be making the most of his final days as he goes out the door, and he certainly isn't letting it kick him on the way out.

I think the most egregious example of the abuse of power, really, that President Biden is engaged in, now that the election is over and he doesn't have to stand for a vote among the American people—so he pretty much has given them a thumb in the eye. Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of this was his pardon of his son Hunter on December 1 of last year.

Despite numerous efforts by the FBI and DOJ to protect Hunter Biden from accountability for his crimes, President Biden decided to attack his own Department of Justice and say his son was selectively and unfairly prosecuted. Well, it is hard to imagine someone thinking they were unfairly targeted when the entire government Agencies did everything they could to protect him from coming to justice.

And thanks to a diligent and careful judge who was able to expose a sweetheart deal that would have exonerated Hunter Biden previously, he was convicted of illegally possessing a firearm, and he stood charged with massive tax fraud.

President Biden said time and time again: I promise I am not going to pardon him. And then he turned around, and he did.

But he didn't stop there. He used his last days in office to go on a little pardon spree, granting clemency to 39 individuals, as well as commuting the sentences of convicted murderers on death row.

These people were convicted of crimes ranging from conspiracy to commit wire fraud in a mortgage fraud scheme to stealing government property, to signing false documents, bank theft, participating in income tax fraud, and the misuse of a Social Security number.

But the truth is, these are not victimless crimes, and they are not the sort of occurrences we want to see happening more frequently. There is a reason why our criminal justice system provides for accountability and punishment in appropriate circumstances. That is to set an example for others not to go down that path and to have some measure of accountability, which is an important part of justice.

These criminals were not the only people that got a last-minute gift from President Biden. On January 4, President Biden announced a list of 19—19—new recipients of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. This included George Soros and others.

George Soros, of course, is a billionaire philanthropist who has doled out billions of dollars for leftwing political causes, from "defund the police" movements to anti-Israel organizations, to those who promote open borders, such as we have experienced, tragically, over the last four years.

Of course, these are the same policies that have caused so much suffering and frustration among the American people, which they voted on. I believe it was a referendum on November 5. The people voted to change the direction the country was headed in because most Americans, according to public opinion polling, felt like America was on the wrong path and needed a change of course.

And now a key architect of those failed policies was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Talk about devaluing an award that is supposed to be given for extraordinary service to the country.

Of course, I support the rights of individuals to be generous with their wealth. America is one of the most generous countries in the world, and I think it is something we should be proud of.

I imagine how our colleagues on the other side of the aisle might act if Republicans honored a prominent conservative philanthropist. Do you think the media or our Democratic colleagues would applaud it in the same way? No chance. Conservative philanthropists have been not only not given Medals of Freedom, they have been subjected to endless scrutiny, including politically motivated subpoenas from our Democratic colleagues on the Judiciary Committee, just this last year. But now, Democrats are rewarding their own with the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

It is like the hearing we had this morning on the Finance Committee. Scott Bessent, the next Secretary of the Treasury, was there. We had to listen to the ranking member go on a diatribe about why it is so important that American taxpayers be exposed to a multitrillion-dollar tax increase. He said this is about tax cuts for the wealthy. But the fact of the matter is—and the nominee pointed this out—that the top 1 percent in the country pay the vast majority of income taxes. But the facts, apparently, are not all that important to our Democratic colleagues.

President Biden wasn't finished rewarding his friends with grants of clemency and Presidential honors before he left office. He also sent a parting gift to one of his favorite beneficiaries, which are radical climate activists.

I don't doubt that the climate is changing. I don't doubt humans have an impact on it. But to say this is the end-all and be-all of all of our policies, to the detriment of our economy, job creation, and so many other important issues, just strikes me as misguided.

One of the consequences is that Americans have been suffering under high prices for energy under President Biden's Presidency. Electricity prices have risen more than 30 percent. We know that these high prices are the direct result of President Biden's policies, which put climate activists in the front seat, while working families are left behind.

But the President couldn't help himself from doing more damage on the way out the door. The day after Christmas, President Biden's Energy Department finalized new climate regulations that would functionally ban almost all natural gas-powered water heaters. Why would he do something like that?

An analysis from the American Gas Association estimates that 40 percent of customers will be directly impacted by a rule with a net cost increase, since they will be required to buy a new electric water heater. The AGA notes that the households affected are largely low income and senior citizens on a fixed income, who are more likely to choose a cost-effective water heater that will now be banned under the rule.

Of course, if people want to buy a more expensive water heater with their own money, I have no objection to that. I am all for the freedom to do so. But to impose additional costs on seniors who have fixed incomes and other low-income families who are struggling to get by under the high prices and the 40-year high inflation under the Biden administration simply adds insult to injury.

But President Biden didn't stop there. Two weeks ago, the Biden administration gave the State of California permission to enforce zero-emissions rules for lawn mowers and leaf blowers. This may sound like a small thing, but it is emblematic of much bigger things, and it adds up. This rule

would prohibit the sale of new equipment under 25 horsepower or 19 kilowatts that failed to achieve “zero emissions.”

Is there no home appliance or device that is safe from this radical agenda? The Biden administration has targeted gas-powered cars, gas stoves, water heaters, and now they want to get after our lawn mowers and leaf blowers.

As I have said before, I don't have any objection to anyone who wants to improve their carbon footprint, if that is important to them, by purchasing new low-emissions lawn mowers. God bless them if they want to do that. But for working families to have to deal with this mandate, who are just trying to keep up with inflation, a new lawn mower just might not be in their budget.

Well, suffice it to say, the Biden administration is working hard on the way out the door and wreaking havoc in the process.

Mr. President, Republicans are taking note. We know that, with President Trump being sworn into office next Monday, with new majorities in the House and the Senate, things are going to change. The American people voted for change, and they are going to see a change—a change away from these radical policies and special interest pieces of legislation or regulation that hurt the vast majority of Americans for the benefit of an ideological agenda.

One of the tools we are going to be using is something called the Congressional Review Act. As the Presiding Officer knows, this is a powerful tool which allows a vote of Congress and a Presidential signature to essentially veto an administrative Agency rule. There is a timeframe. I believe it is 60 legislative days during which we can look back and essentially impose a legislative veto of that rule.

Using this mechanism, Congress can review and rescind regulations that it disapproves of, because, of course, many of these regulations are promulgated by administrative Agencies that never have to stand for election. They never have to appeal to the voters. They never have to explain themselves to the voters. They just do what they do, which is create more and more red-tape and regulation.

So I am glad we are going to be able to focus, soon after we confirm President Trump's Cabinet, on Congressional Review Act regulatory disapprovals. I plan on introducing a few of these myself so we can reverse many of the Biden administration's misguided regulations. I know other colleagues plan to do the same thing.

President Biden may have been busy over the last few months, since the November 5 election, but we are gearing up to be even busier, undoing much of the mischief that he has wrought during these last couple of months on his way out the door.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to display a framed item during my remarks.

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

NOMINATION OF PETER B. HEGSETH

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, in these serious times, we need a serious candidate to lead our military. We need someone with merit to lead our meritocracy, someone with moral strength to be in charge of protecting our national strength.

For all these reasons and quite a few more, I will not be voting to confirm the extremely unqualified Pete Hegseth as Secretary of Defense. Our troops deserve better than a guy who was seemingly only nominated because he used to host Trump's favorite TV show on FOX News.

I have plenty to say about Mr. Hegseth and the many, many ways in which he would degrade our military readiness. It is no secret I disagreed with Trump on nearly everything during his first term. Yet I still voted to confirm both James Mattis and Mark Esper when he nominated them for this very role. The thing is, Hegseth has never led thousands of people like Mattis had. He never ran an entire Army like Esper did. No, the only thing Hegseth has ever run, he has run it into the ground. The only major organizations he has ever led, he has led into debt.

Pete Hegseth is unqualified, he is unprepared, he is unethical, and, most of all, he is unfit. Mr. Hegseth may talk about how having had dust on his boots makes him worthy of becoming Secretary of Defense. Well, as someone who left her boots in a dusty field in Iraq, let me tell you exactly why he is unfit to lead our heroes.

Mr. Hegseth likes to say that our military is a great meritocracy, and I agree with that. So let's go over his supposed merits for this role.

The Secretary of Defense oversees the Federal Government's largest Agency. They manage a \$900 billion budget, along with the 3 million servicemembers and civilians who fall under its umbrella.

During his time in uniform, Pete Hegseth never commanded a unit with more than 200 people. Meanwhile, on the civilian side, both organizations that he led went into debt. In fact, he so badly mismanaged one of them that they had to bring in a forensic accountant to clean up the mess that he had made.

That is it. Those are his only supposed qualifications to head up one of the most complex, important organizations in the world.

Listen, there are plenty of Republicans whose policies I may disagree with but whom I would vote to confirm because I know that they, too, have spent their lives working to keep our country strong and could demonstrate why they are qualified for this role. Mr. Hegseth is not one of those people.

Who knows why Donald Trump picked this guy. Maybe Hegseth's busi-

ness failures make Trump feel better about his own six bankruptcies. Maybe it is because Hegseth spent years fawning over Trump on FOX News, and Trump's dream Cabinet is a bunch of yes-men who know how to kiss up to him on TV—or maybe it is just that all of “Cadet Bone Spurs” draft dodging has left him with no clue as to what kind of leader our military needs.

Look, at his confirmation hearing on Tuesday, I gave Mr. Hegseth every opportunity to show me that I was wrong, to prove that he could do this job, that he does know the first thing—or anything—about what it takes to take on this massive responsibility of being the Secretary of Defense. I asked him basic questions that even the most junior folks working in the Pentagon would know, like naming one of the main international agreements he would be responsible for leading. He couldn't name one. I asked him to tell me just a single country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Again, he couldn't give me one—and one of those is our longest treaty ally for 190 years—not a single one of the 10.

This was shocking—yet not surprising—from a man whose main form of policy education has come from reading the FOX News teleprompter. This was pitiful—yet predictable—from a guy who has said that we women do not belong in combat, who has dared to claim that the military is lowering its standard so that we, the poor, fragile, fairer sex—and, God forbid, us moms—can serve. Well, the only standards being lowered today are the ones for Secretary of Defense. Our female servicemembers have earned the jobs that they are in, unlike Mr. Hegseth who won't even say whether he would refuse an unlawful order.

I have next to me a framed copy of the Soldier's Creed—a poster that usually hangs over my desk here in the Senate and has done so for the last 8 years. It is the same copy that hung above my bed at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center when I spent over a year in the hospital recovering from my shoot-down. It is the same poster whose lines I read before I was wheeled into each and every one of my surgeries. It is the same one whose words were repeated over and over to myself on the days when I was in so much pain that I couldn't breathe yet was determined to fight my way back to health so I could serve again next to the buddies who saved my life. These words helped me find the strength I needed when I needed it the most because they reminded me of who I was and that I was a proud member of the greatest fighting force on the face of the Earth, whose duty it was to live up to the sacrifices of my fellow soldiers.

I would like to quote a couple of lines from the creed right now.

I will always place the mission first . . . I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks.

Our troops follow these words every day as we ask them to do the hardest

thing imaginable. We ask them to leave their families, to potentially never hold their spouses' hands again, to maybe never get to see their babies take their first steps. We ask them to do all of that and then walk into enemy fire and be good enough, competent enough, qualified enough that, regardless of the threat they face, they will still be able to do their jobs. We ask them to be so ready for the mission at hand that they can still fly that helicopter, still man that ship, still fight that fire until their very last breaths.

Tell me: How can we ask these warriors to train and perform to the absolute highest standard if we are going to confirm a guy who doesn't seem to care enough to prepare to lead them in any way?

Listen, these are dangerous times on the geopolitical stage. Our adversaries are watching, waiting to see if we really will put in power someone so obviously unqualified.

Mr. Hegseth made a point of saying at Tuesday's hearing that every single warfighter should be hired based on performance, readiness, and merit. And I agree with him. However, he fails to meet every single one of those metrics. He is asking to be handed a job he is not prepared for because of his relationship with Donald Trump, but this role is too important, our troops' lives too precious to let personal ambitions get in the way of the mission at hand.

So let me close with this: Part of being a leader is knowing when you are not competent enough to do the job.

Well, Mr. Hegseth, you are not technically proficient; you are not tactically proficient; and your nomination is an insult to those brave enough to be serving our Nation. So you, sir, are a no go at this station.

I am voting no on Pete Hegseth's nomination to be Secretary of Defense. If my colleagues care more about keeping our Nation strong than genuflecting to Donald Trump, then they should have the courage to vote no as well.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

S. 5

Ms. LUMMIS. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the Laken Riley Act.

Nearly a year ago, Laken Riley—a college girl more than 1,000 miles from our southern border—was jogging on her university's intramural fields. Also more than 1,000 miles from our southern border, an illegal criminal in our country brutally attacked and murdered her in broad daylight. For 18 minutes, Laken Riley—that young woman in the prime of her life, with

boundless potential—fought for her life against an assailant who never should have been in this country to begin with.

The Biden administration's open border policies served the criminal's depravity more than Laken's and her family's. In fact, they served the criminal every bit as much as they failed Laken and her family. Laken's killer easily crossed our southern border with millions of others; and when he committed several crimes and was arrested, a Biden administration-led ICE made no effort to deport him. Had he been appropriately prosecuted for his previous crimes, the Riley family would have celebrated Riley's birthday instead of mourning an empty chair. On February 22, 2024, it would have been an ordinary day for their family instead of the worst day of their lives.

No family should face the nightmare Laken's family endured, and it is our responsibility as lawmakers to correct the glaring failures in our system that led to her tragic and preventable death.

The Laken Riley Act won't bring Laken back, but it is a vehicle for turning the Riley family's pain into purpose and partnering together to protect American families. This legislation's sole goal is to hold known criminal illegal aliens accountable for their actions and enable States to bring civil charges against Federal officials who fail to uphold our immigration laws.

Like all of us serving in this body, I came to the U.S. Senate because I wanted to make a positive difference for the American people. This is one of those opportunities. We have the ability to do that right now by getting this bill to the President's desk. Let's honor Laken's legacy by passing this bipartisan legislation to protect millions of Americans across our country.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

HONORING OFFICER MICHAEL HORAN

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the service and sacrifice of Greensboro Police Officer Michael Horan.

On Monday, December 23—2 days before Christmas—Officer Horan was the first officer to respond to a call of a man with a firearm at a Food Lion supermarket in Greensboro, NC. As Officer Horan entered the store and confronted the suspect, the suspect engaged in a struggle that eventually led to Officer Horan being shot and killed. The suspect fled the scene and led law enforcement on a multiple-county chase. The brave men and women from various law enforcement agencies eventually apprehended the suspect on Interstate 40.

Officer Horan personified the very best of law enforcement. Greensboro Police Chief John Thompson stated that Officer Horan was "a valued and respected member of the Greensboro Police family."

He worked for the Greensboro Police Department since 2017 and had a distin-

guished record of service with the U.S. Coast Guard. As a U.S. Coast Guard member, Officer Horan served as a law enforcement officer, tactical fast boat instructor, and search and rescue operator for the safety and security of the United States.

Even when he was off duty, he exemplified valor. In 2019, Officer Horan received a lifesaving award from the Greensboro Police Department for saving a father and son who had been caught in a rip current at a beach at Emerald Isle.

As impressive as Officer Horan was for his exemplary work, it was his job as a family man—a loving husband, father, and son.

One of his colleagues noted:

One of the main things most people would know about officer Horan, is how much he loved his family.

He loved his daughter. If you ask anybody in the department to describe him—

One friend said—

I feel like his daughter would be in the conversation.

He loved his family, and he included it in virtually every conversation he had with his colleagues.

He upheld the oath to protect and serve his community and his country. He exemplified what it means to be an extraordinary public servant, and he made the ultimate sacrifice.

My deepest condolences go out to Officer Horan's family for their tremendous loss, and my condolences go out to the community of Greensboro, which lost one of their finest, most decent public servants. We will never forget his service.

Mr. President, Officer Horan actually passed away a year ago last December. We were not in session at the time, so I thought it was appropriate to recognize the anniversary of his death, but I want to talk a little bit more.

(Mr. BUDD assumed the Chair.)

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Mr. President, since 2015, when I first took office as a U.S. Senator in my home State of North Carolina, we have tragically lost far too many law enforcement officers. In fact, we have lost 85 in the time that I have been a U.S. Senator, since 2015. This includes deaths related to law enforcement assaults, gunfire, vehicular pursuits, and duty-related illnesses.

These officers took an oath to protect and serve our communities. These heroes made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives to protect their communities. I will not get into all the details about each officer. What I would ask is unanimous consent to provide a list of the following officers since I have been a Member of the U.S. Senate to be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

Inspector Robert James Bowling, Automobile Crash, 2015; Patrol Officer Anthony E. Lossiah, Duty Related Illness, 2015; K9 Officer Timothy James Brackeen, Gunfire, 2016; Deputy Sheriff John Thomas Isenhour,

Struck by Vehicle, 2016; Major Jay Russell Memmelaar, Jr., Heart Attack, 2017; Trooper Brandon Carroll Peterson, Heart Attack, 2017; Sergeant Meggan Lee Callahan, Assault, 2017; Correction Enterprises Manager Veronica Skinner Darden, Assault, 2017; Correctional Officer Justin James Smith, Assault, 2017; Correctional Officer Wendy Letitia Shannon, Assault, 2017; Deputy Sheriff Alexis Thunder Eagle Locklear, Automobile Crash, 2018; Deputy Sheriff David Lee Sean Manning, Automobile Crash, 2018; Trooper Samuel Newton Bullard, Vehicle Pursuit, 2018; Senior Police Officer Christopher James Driver, Automobile Crash, 2018; Master Trooper Kevin Keith Conner, Gunfire, 2018; Corporal Travis Wells, Automobile Crash, 2018; Master Trooper Benjamin Derek Wallace, Heart Attack, 2018; Police Officer Jared William Franks, Automobile Crash, 2018; Police Officer Jason Barton Quick, Struck by Vehicle, 2018; K9 Officer Jordan Harris Sheldon, Gunfire, 2019; Deputy Sheriff Makeem Rictrell Brooks, Automobile Crash, 2019; Trooper Nolan James Sanders, Automobile Crash, 2020; Deputy Sheriff Sypraseuth "Bud" Phouangphrachanh, Covid19, 2020; Senior Detention Officer Alexander Reginald Pettitway, Jr., Covid19, 2020; Deputy Sheriff Ryan Phillip Hendrix, Gunfire, 2020; Correctional Officer II Allen Bruce Trivett, Covid19, 2020; Correctional Sergeant II Michael Robert Flagg, Covid19, 2020; Deputy Sheriff LaKiya Louise Rouse, Covid19, 2020; Correctional Officer III Charles Warren Harris, Jr., Covid19, 2020; Lieutenant Terry Sampson, Covid19, 2020; Correctional Officer III Thomas Daniel Roberts, Jr., Covid19, 2020; Correctional Officer Joseph Lloyd Greinke, Covid19, 2020; Correctional Sergeant III Christopher Eugene Sorrenti, Covid19, 2020; Deputy Sheriff Jared Michael Allison, Automobile Crash, 2020; Police Officer Tyler Avery Herndon, Gunfire, 2020; Master Corporal Norman Odie Daye, Jr., Covid19, 2020; Police Officer Jason Nicholas Shuping, Gunfire, 2020; Associate Warden III Julian Arsenio Priest, III, Covid19, 2020; First Sergeant Timothy Lee Howell, Covid19, 2021; Correctional Lieutenant III Anthony Lynn Hardie, Covid19, 2021; Master Trooper James Brent Montgomery, Covid19, 2021; Sergeant LaShonda Owens, Covid19, 2021; Deputy Sheriff Joseph Brandon Gore, Covid19, 2021; Police Officer David Dewayne Parde, Gunfire, 2021; Deputy Sheriff Logan Shane Fox, Gunfire, 2021; Sergeant Christopher David Ward, Gunfire, 2021; Officer Robert Craig Cloninger, Heart Attack, 2021; Deputy Sheriff Dennis Wayne Dixon, Covid19, 2021; Deputy Sheriff Eric Otis Ritter, Covid19, 2021; Correctional Sergeant III Ledell Graham, Covid19, 2021; Probation/Parole Officer II Julie Ann Harper, Covid19, 2021; Police Officer Carl Lee Proper, Covid19, 2021; Captain David Edwin MacAlpine, Covid19, 2021; Police Chief Donald Hall, Covid19, 2021; Sergeant Donald William Ramey, Covid19, 2021; Lieutenant Matthew Eric Dow, Covid19, 2021; Police Officer Julio Cesar Herrera, Jr., Covid19, 2021; Master Deputy William Edward Marsh, Covid19, 2021; Lieutenant William Oscar McMurtray, III, Covid19, 2021; Correctional Lieutenant II Dennis Eugene Boykin, Covid19, 2021; Police Officer Ryan Andrew Hayworth, Vehicular Assault, 2021; Sergeant Michael Shannon McDonald, Covid19, 2021; Police Officer Mia Danielle Figueroa-Goodwin, Automobile Crash, 2021; Trooper John Sumter Horton, Struck by Vehicle, 2022; Captain Reginald Kamal Smith, Covid19, 2022; Correctional Officer III Helen Mae Smith, Heart Attack, 2022; Detective Michael W. Godwin, Covid19, 2022; Sergeant Matthew Ryan Fishman, Gunfire, 2022; Deputy Sheriff Ned P. Byrd, Gunfire, 2022; Detention Corporal Gregory Thomas Horne, Sr., Duty Related Illness, 2022; Police Officer Gabriel Jesus Torres, Gunfire,

2022; Deputy Sheriff José Angel DeLeon, Automobile Crash, 2022; Deputy Sheriff Oscar Yovani Bolanos-Anavisca, Jr., Vehicular Assault, 2022; Deputy Sheriff II Auston Smith Reudelhuber, Automobile Crash, 2023; Sergeant Russell Earl Lavarl Jones, Heart Attack, 2023; Sergeant Philip Dale Nix, Gunfire, 2023; Deputy Sheriff Christopher Johnson, Automobile Crash, 2024; Deputy U.S. Marshal Thomas M. Weeks, Gunfire, 2024; Investigator William "Alden" Elliott, Gunfire, 2024; Investigator Samuel Poloche, Gunfire, 2024; Police Officer Joshua Eyer, Gunfire, 2024; Major Michelle Lynn Quintero, Weather/Natural Disaster, 2024; Courthouse Security Deputy James "Jim" Lau, Weather/Natural Disaster, 2024; Police Officer Michael Horan, Gunfire, 2024; Master Trooper Anthony S. Godwin, Medical Condition, 2024.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, as we start the 119th Congress, my colleague from North Carolina, who is currently presiding—I think we both agree that we want to emphasize that Congress has a role in supporting and protecting our law enforcement officers across this country.

According to the National Fraternal Order of Police, in 2024, 342 officers were shot in the line of duty. Of those officers, 50 officers were tragically killed by criminals.

Unfortunately, over the past few years, we have seen shameful behavior from certain—and I hope and I pray that it is a minority of our society, but we have people out there raising money for fundraising runs called the 13.12-mile run. Mr. President, "1312" translates into "ACAB," and on their website, they proudly proclaim that "ACAB" stands for "All Cops Are Bastards." Let that sink in.

It is appalling to hear this kind of rhetoric, and it has to stop. These dangerous statements not only create distrust and disdain for our brave men and women in blue—the vast majority of whom are good, hard-working people that we all know in our communities—but it has made their job to protect and serve more difficult and more deadly.

We have to do better. We have to protect law enforcement. That is why I plan to reintroduce multiple pieces of legislation in the coming weeks.

First among them is going to be the Protect and Serve Act. It makes it a Federal crime for anyone who knowingly causes or attempts to cause bodily harm or injury to a law enforcement officer. It is amazing it is not a crime already. I hope to do so with strong bipartisan support when I file the bill and get it passed in this Congress.

We also must act to punish criminals who intentionally murder law enforcement. That is why I will also be introducing the Justice for Fallen Law Enforcement Act. This legislation would create a criminal penalty for the murder of a local, State, or Federal law enforcement officer, punishable with the death penalty or life imprisonment without parole.

I urge all Americans listening to contact your Senators and Representatives and tell them that you want to

protect law enforcement officers and support enhancing penalties for those who would do them harm.

The men and women in blue are heroes. They deserve our support. We need everyone in our communities to stand up to these people who would not want them in the community, who would not want them to respond to a 9-1-1 call. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine our communities if the logical conclusion of these people, who hate law enforcement officers so much that they proudly profess that all cops are bastards, publicly to raise money?

We need to increase awareness, and we need to make absolutely certain that every man and woman in blue knows we have their back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

NOMINATION OF PETER B. HEGSETH

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to reject Pete Hegseth as the next Secretary of Defense.

Pete Hegseth is the most unqualified nominee for Secretary of Defense in our Nation's history. At his confirmation hearing, Pete Hegseth bobbed and weaved to avoid answering just basic questions about his record, but what Hegseth failed to account for is that his entire record is damning.

I would like my Senate colleagues, people who are seriously considering voting to confirm Pete Hegseth, to think long and hard about this decision. We need a Secretary of Defense who will be ready at 2 in the morning to give life-or-death national security advice to the President. Would you trust Pete Hegseth, who has allegedly been so drunk at work events that he passed out on a bus and urinated in front of the hotel where his colleagues were staying, to answer that call?

We need a Secretary of Defense who will help us root out the problem of sexual assault in the military. Would you trust Pete Hegseth, who has been credibly accused of raping a woman and buying her silence, to protect victims of sexual assault?

We need a Secretary of Defense who will be able to manage the Nation's largest Federal Agency, one that oversees almost 3.4 million people and a budget of nearly \$850 billion a year. Would you trust Pete Hegseth, who drove a small veterans nonprofit to the brink of bankruptcy, to manage billions of our tax dollars?

The list of glaring disqualifications goes on and on. Hegseth supports requiring every senior military officer to pass a political litmus test. This politicization of the military is a slap in the face to leaders who have served their country honorably for decades.

But the point is that Pete Hegseth is not just unqualified for the role; he is a walking national security threat.

We need a Secretary of Defense who will help our country meet its recruiting goals—something we are already struggling with. Pete Hegseth has said that women in the military "shouldn't

be in combat at all.” Mr. President, 300,000 women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 9/11. Pete Hegseth has now insulted every one of them. That is not how a leader of the military will inspire people to join our cause.

When people are responsible for our national defense, we ask something extraordinary of them. We ask them to put their lives on the line. All three of my brothers served in the military. My oldest brother was career military. So I know how important that service is and how important it is that we pick the right person to lead our men and women in uniform.

Pete Hegseth claims that our brave women in the military are somehow lowering our standards, but it is his lack of qualifications, his lack of character, and his lack of judgment that lower the standards for Secretary of Defense.

We need a Secretary of Defense whom we can rely on to keep all of us safe. Frankly, it is hard to imagine a worse choice than Pete Hegseth.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, the last 4 years have been nothing short of a national nightmare. The runup to the nightmare began in 2020.

After fending off a ridiculous impeachment attempt in the early months of 2020, President Trump was riding high, and the economy was booming.

Under President Trump, we saw record levels of low unemployment for all Americans, especially among Black and Hispanic Americans. Inflation, which is ultimately a tax on the paychecks of hard-working Americans, was also at record lows.

We had the most secure border in history. Dangerous terrorists, cartel members, and human traffickers weren't flooding into our country. Americans' jobs were more secure because they didn't have to compete with millions of foreigners who have entered the country the last 4 years trying to steal their jobs. The cost of buying a home was also cheaper as a result.

Under President Trump, we were energy independent. This made the cost of living more affordable for all Americans. We were able to power American homes, cars, and factories with reliable and abundant energy.

Those are just a few of the domestic successes that Americans were benefiting from under President Trump.

On the global stage, we finally had stability after decades of foreign wars. Under President Trump, there were no new wars. We were respected around the world and feared by our adversaries. Russia didn't dare invade Ukraine when President Trump was in office. NATO countries were told to pay up: Pay your bills. China wasn't imposing its will in the South China Sea or across the world. China was con-

tained, and its influence was diminishing.

Under President Trump, the Abraham Accords were signed, bringing peace to the Middle East. As we have seen the last few years, achieving peace in the Middle East was no easy feat. But President Trump achieved it, and he did it quickly. The United States and the world were in harmony.

The left couldn't stand these many successes that President Trump's administration was achieving at home and abroad, so they pulled out all stops to take him down. That is when the deep state bureaucrats and globalist organizations worked together to intensify the COVID-19 crisis. At the same time, the George Floyd riots erupted and destroyed cities across our country. Liberal DAs and politicians didn't do anything to stop it. It was absolute anarchy—total chaos orchestrated by leftwing politicians, the media, and antifa thugs.

Meanwhile, the media tried to manufacture a scandal because President Trump held up a Bible in front of a historic church, while the rioters burning the city of DC were ignored.

It was all a ploy to take down President Trump and tarnish his legacy.

Before the plot to take out the President was in full swing, we saw America achieving heights we had never ever seen before.

For a moment, the left thought they had bested Trump with the COVID sham and the Floyd riots and ultimately by rigging the election. But after controlling Biden by hiding him in the basement and then installing him as President, the Democrats were like a dog who finally caught the car. Once the Democrats took the White House, they quickly realized they didn't know how to run the country. It is not quite like running a struggle session in a Berkeley classroom or leading an HR call for a woke corporation.

The Democrats had 4 years to show the country they could govern more effectively than President Trump, but what have they done? What is one thing they have done to make our country better? I can't think of one policy, one law or directive that actually benefited the American people.

From day one, Joe Biden and KAMALA HARRIS invited foreigners to illegally enter our country. They weren't shy. Joe Biden told foreigners to “surge the border” and “You should [all] come.” While the administration opened the border, they shut down the Keystone Pipeline, making Americans pay more for groceries and gas.

The Biden administration engaged in a culture war domestically, embracing far-left ideas about sexuality, gender, and race. We have been told repeatedly over the past 4 years that men can get pregnant. And the Democrats didn't just push woke ideology on adults; they forced it on children in their classrooms and on social media.

They have supported biological men competing in women's sports. They are

perfectly OK with men sharing locker rooms and showering with girls. The Biden administration published a rule that would destroy title IX which was created to protect women and girls, all in the name of gender equity.

You know, not only did Democrats wage war on American culture, they weaponized our justice system, going after President Trump, conservatives, and anyone who dared to oppose their agenda. Just look at how they went after the January 6 protesters, proliferators with the FACE Act, parents at the school boards, and the dozens of illegal actions they took against President Trump.

The Biden administration, with the help of congressional Democrats, passed a bunch of bills with names that sound good, but actually they harm many Americans.

Take the Inflation Reduction Act, for example, one of their prize bills that they have passed in the last few years. It was a legal way to launder money to blue States to bail them out, while red States were hung out to dry.

It pumped money we don't have into the economy, causing the runaway inflation we are dealing with today. The administration was also weak on the world stage appeasing every interest but the interests of the American people. This administration was committed to cozying up to Iran by reinstating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action as if the world wasn't already a dangerous place. Why would President Biden's administration agree to help Iran improve their nuclear facilities? It makes no sense.

This administration bent over backward for NATO, handing over billions of hard-earned American taxpayer dollars with no plan on ending the war in Ukraine. It executed a disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan that left 13 servicemembers dead, with many others severely wounded. This administration was basically asleep at the wheel.

Who was running the country? Well, it wasn't Joe Biden. It was clear from the 2020 campaign that he didn't have the mental capacity to be President. To make matters worse, he spent 570 days, 40 percent of his Presidency, on vacation. Instead, the White House was run by a committee of leftwing staffers and special interests who ultimately ran the country into the ground, and the media and the Democrats were complicit. It is truly shameful what they have done to this country in the last 4 years.

But now we are finally turning the page. We are entering a new golden age in America with President Trump's return to the White House, and this is our last chance at righting the ship the left has steered so far off course.

President Trump will return our country to the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We will return to the Judeo-Christian beliefs and principles of the West that made our Nation so great. And how should the Senate help return our country to these principles?

We need to confirm every single one of President Trump's nominees as quickly as possible. We don't have time to drag our feet on any of these nominees. The Democrats never once attempted to block President Biden's Cabinet nominees. Zero Senate Democrats voted against any one of his picks—zero.

President Trump needs to be able to exercise the full power and authority of his office as soon as he is sworn in, and that requires confirming his Cabinet picks.

It will also require the issuing of Executive orders to undo anything that President Biden has done in taking congressional action to put these policies in place.

Expect a flurry of Executive orders, a new offensive idea to rebuild our broken country. Expect Executive orders on the border, on unleashing American energy, and getting DEI out of our government and out of the lives of American people.

We also need to get behind President Trump on passing one reconciliation bill that will secure our border, reignite our energy independence, and cut taxes so the American economy can boom again.

On the global stage, the Senate needs to get behind President Trump pressuring NATO, all the NATO countries, to pay their fair share. No more military handouts for European countries and no more lighting taxpayer dollars on fire on behalf of Ukraine. It is time to get this war over with.

The Senate needs to support President Trump and exert maximum pressure on Iran and other terrorist organizations wreaking havoc on the Middle East and the West.

We also need to join President Trump's commitment on shrinking the Federal Government through strong congressional action. We will do this by working closely with the Department of Government Efficiency, better known as DOGE.

We need to shrink the government, cutting the ridiculous regulations that are crushing American small businesses.

And, finally, we need to focus on accountability. We need to hold people accountable for the damage that has been done to our country. We need to support the pardon of January 6 protesters who were wrongly prosecuted and horribly treated by our justice system.

We need to step up and fight for pro-life, pro-life protesters who were persecuted by the administration under the FACE Act. We need to open investigations into DOJ Civil Rights and National Security Divisions, and that starts by confirming Kash Patel and Pam Bondi to the posts where President Trump needs them and needs them in a hurry.

We need to be aggressive in these pursuits. Senate Republicans need to demonstrate courage and will and resolve like President Trump showed on

the campaign trail. Are we willing to take a bullet for this country like President Trump did?

Are we willing to take on the fake news media who will try to undermine his everyday agenda? The job ahead of us won't be easy. The economy is in bad shape, job numbers are down, inflation is sky high. Our enemies are on the move abroad and in the interior of our country, but the American people chose President Trump and the Republicans for such a time like this.

They gave us a mandate to deliver them from the past 4 years of hell that this administration has caused. But now, it is a new day in America. The nightmare is almost over. And in a few more days, the Sun will rise in America. Greatness awaits us if we answer the call of the American people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, as you and everybody here knows, a little bit over a week ago, fires broke out in Los Angeles County. And some of you have reached out in the time since to offer your support, to offer your assistance, and even offer condolences for those who have perished in this significant disaster. And I want to thank you for your initial outreach.

My colleague Senator SCHIFF and I have come to the floor today to provide you all a little bit of an update and to lay a foundation on some of the key issues that we are going to need to work together on as we move forward.

And let me begin by just taking a step back for a second and acknowledging that, even before the winds increased last week, we knew that the risk of a potential large fire was high. In the midst of a historically dry season in Southern California, forecasters predicted hurricane-force winds, along with little to no humidity—essentially, a dry hurricane condition, if you can imagine that. Californians know that when there is a red flag warning, conditions are ripe for large-scale fires. But what came next, what actually materialized, would become the worst natural disaster in the history of Los Angeles: 100-mile-per-hour winds carrying burning embers from home to home, multiple simultaneous fires burning more than 12,000 structures and more than 40,000 acres.

And to give you a sense of the area I am talking about, I am talking about nearly three times the size of Manhattan. At least two dozen people have lost their lives, with more expected as search and rescue crews continue to comb through the devastation.

And over the course of the last week, I have had the opportunity to visit

command posts and meet with firefighters, had the opportunity to distribute meals to many of the victims and to see, to tour, to visit the destruction firsthand. Yes, there are survivors, people impacted from communities like the Pacific Palisades—some with names and faces that you will recognize from television and the entertainment industry. But I assure you there are also a lot of other faces and families that you won't recognize from the working-class and diverse communities throughout Los Angeles County.

It is people like a woman in Altadena who was 9 months pregnant when the Eaton fire burned down not just her home but the new nursery that she had prepared. And it is the 66-year-old man who stayed to try to protect the home that had been in his family for five decades but who was found dead with a garden hose in his hand. You can imagine his last moments. It is one of the reasons why I have been saying over and over that every house you see is really a home, and every home represents a family—a family who now mourns maybe the loss of a relative, maybe the loss of their home, or loss of irreplaceable items like family photo albums or a wedding dress or baby pictures or a loved one's red, white, and blue military burial flag.

But through the destruction, we have also seen some signs of hope, like the firefighter in the Pacific Palisades who offered to go back and save two dogs trapped while the neighborhood was still burning or a 14-year-old Avery who saw the devastation that hit her community and created a charity, Altadena Girls, to provide beauty products and clothes to her friends so that they could feel like themselves again while coping with this disaster.

Every day we hear stories like this, even in the midst of a disaster, people coming to each other's aid.

But even as I stand here today—as we stand here today—the fires are still burning, and the fight continues. Our hearts go out to all the impacted families, and they also go out to the heroic firefighters and other first responders working tirelessly through multiday shifts to put out these fires—not only the brave State and local firefighters, but I want to acknowledge the Federal firefighters too. To the State and local officials working day and night to protect our State and our communities, thank you. And I also want to acknowledge Governor Newsom for his steady hand during this time.

And we are so grateful to our neighboring States who continue to send resources. And, no, not just States that are considered blue States like Oregon and Washington, but States that many people refer to as red States like South Dakota and Wyoming and Montana and Florida, who continue to send resources with no strings attached, no conditions. This is what we do for each other. There is a reason it is called mutual aid.

And I also want to thank every one of my colleagues who, in 2023, helped me

to secure seven C-130 air tankers for California. They were surplus military aircraft that California received and paid to retrofit, the first of which is already on the scene fighting these fires as we speak.

But soon there will come a time when we need to more than just support our response to these disasters; we will need support for our recovery. And we expect Congress to support California just as Congress has been there for States across the country in their times of crisis, with no conditions and no strings attached. Because a recovery isn't just a California fight. We are truly in this together as Americans. Whether it is wildfires across the Western United States or tornados in the Midwest, ice storms in Texas, or hurricanes in the Southeast, Mother Nature does not distinguish between red States and blue States and neither should our disaster response efforts or our recovery efforts. That is why, when tragedy struck just a few months ago from hurricanes Milton and Helene, Democrats didn't demand aid be attached to some Democratic wish list of priorities. Not for a second did we think of attaching strings.

So when I hear about political jabs and insults on social media while my home State is burning, it is not distracting. It is certainly not entertaining. It is offensive, and it is dangerous. Because let's be clear, in times of crisis, California has always been there for the rest of our country. And now we expect our country to be here for California.

If Speaker JOHNSON or any Member of Congress, for that matter, is worried about the Federal debt, let me assure you: California has already paid the bill. California, as you may know, is the largest economy of any State in the nation. We are the single largest contributor of tax revenue to the Federal Treasury by far. In 2022 alone, California paid \$83 billion more to the Federal Government than it received.

So from additional disaster assistance funding to a serious conversation about disaster insurance that I am eager to continue, we are going to need everyone onboard.

And to my Republican colleagues who may be wondering whether the policy should change about no strings attached, let me remind you that this is also a fundamental matter of decency as Americans. It is the same decency that my colleague Senator SCOTT from Florida and my colleague Senator TILLIS from North Carolina have shown in their public comments this last week or that several of my California House Republican colleagues have shown by supporting our State's major disaster declaration request. They know, as we should all remember, that this is about our unity as a nation. So, yes, California will need you for the long haul.

And to President-elect Trump, I, too, invite you to tour Altadena and the Pacific Palisades, which, by the way, is

about 30 miles from your golf course in Rancho Palos Verdes. Come meet the first responders. Come meet the families that have been affected by these fires.

And, finally, I want to speak to the people of California because it is, indeed, a long road ahead. And there will be more challenges to overcome as we continue the search and rescue phase of this, as we go into the environmental remediation and debris removal, and eventually the rebuilding of homes and businesses. It is a long road, and there will be challenges to overcome indeed.

But I promise you this: There will be a day when the fires are put out, when the homes and entire communities are rebuilt better and more resilient than they have been before and the Sun will shine and the kids will smile.

Together—together—we are going to get through this.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. President, I rise today to address the Senate on behalf of the people of California. And I thank my colleague Senator PADILLA for his leadership during this time of incredible difficulty and strain for our fellow constituents.

The unimaginable has happened, and our hearts are broken—a city encircled in a blaze and a perfect storm of fire and wind and with a system stretched beyond its breaking point. A natural disaster so immense in size and scale it will dwarf any recovery and rebuilding effort since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire.

It is that immense and impending recovery effort that I am asking—I am pleading—for your help with today.

Already, the support that you and the President have given California have helped firefighters battle the flames, helped save lives, and helped those who lost everything find shelter.

I want to express my particular appreciation for President Biden and what the administration has done, the almost immediate declaration of a disaster which unlocked important FEMA and other funding, the commitment to match—to provide, really—100 percent of Federal funding for the first 6 months of these fire mitigation efforts.

I am very grateful for what the Congress and the President have done.

This recovery is going to be measured in years, not months. Even so, we must bring a sense of urgency to the recovery and not let it linger.

When the flames are finally out, the cleanup begins in earnest, and the rebuilding moves forward with all haste. After the attention of the world has turned away from the raging inferno and its aftermath, ours in this body must not because the loss is immeasurable—lives lost, homes lost, businesses lost, neighborhoods lost, pets lost, memories lost, neighborhoods simply gone in an hour. Entire communities burned to ash. Families brought together in grief. Churches and synagogues have burned down, but their

members still gather as one because amidst the darkness and destruction, we have seen rays of hope. For when one part of our State is hurting—literally on fire—we all come together.

First responders from all across our great State and so many others rushed to Southern California. A woman I met at a Red Cross at the Pacoima evacuation site, so grateful, despite everything, for the assistance that she was receiving, for the dignity with which she was treated by these Red Cross workers—she told me she plans to set up a \$10-a-month donation from her monthly Social Security disability check. People are dropping off clothes and supplies by the thousands, so much that some of these centers are overwhelmed with people bringing material by.

That is the California way.

This is deeply personal for Senator PADILLA and myself. We know so many families impacted by these fires because they are our neighbors and friends.

I represented Altadena in the House of Representatives for decades. It is a vibrant, diverse community, a city of families, of places of worship, and of deep culture and history. When I drove through Altadena just a few days ago, the destruction was complete—entire city blocks razed. Homes, small businesses, schools gone in just a few minutes like some post-apocalyptic scene.

Driving around that area at night in which small fires still dotted the landscape amidst the rubble, it was hard to recognize what I was seeing. The place where my wife and I got married burned to the ground. So many other community institutions vanished: the Altadena Community Church, gone; the Pasadena Jewish Temple, gone, still smoldering, that temple, when I saw it, and burning inside like an eternal flame, a symbol of God's presence even amidst the unimaginable; the mountains above Altadena, once the scene of such beautiful greenery and nature, now charred beyond recognition.

Just like Altadena, much of the Palisades are just gone. Fire ripped through this community leveling entire neighborhoods. One bakery owner in Topanga described the fires that tore through her community simply as "Armageddon," charred cars, burned-out furniture block after block.

These were generational homes and neighborhoods—neighborhoods people are proud to be part of and raise their children in, now forever changed.

In Altadena, Victor Shaw was found in his house holding a garden hose. He died trying to save his home. His sister Shari barely escaped as the house went up in flames.

One man, Zaire, was separated from his sister who lived next door. Amidst the chaos, he was able to evacuate his baby and elderly mother. The next day when he returned, he found his sister's car outside her home and found her remains in the rubble. "Evelyn, why didn't you leave," he asked.

“[W]hy didn’t you leave?”

One father refused to leave the side of his son who had cerebral palsy, fighting to his last breath. The last words he said to his daughter were, “Baby, I’m getting ready to evacuate, I love you . . . Baby, I got to go, the fire’s made it to my yard.”

Anthony Mitchell is a hero.

Edgar McGregor is well known in Pasadena for his daily trash pickups in the foothills. But now, to the community, he will be known for something more. In a Facebook group post, he alerted residents 2 days before the fires to pack go-bags. When it mattered most, he typed two words: “Get out.”

“Get out.” His simple post may have saved lives.

People are surviving now but only barely hanging on.

I spoke with Patricia at one of the shelters on the West Side. She stayed a couple of nights in a motel but could no longer afford it, and her asthma was making it hard to breathe.

One firefighter, Jonathan, had been battling the blazes in the Palisades since the first night. I remember talking to this L. A. Fire Department firefighter, and he had told me he wasn’t sure he was going to make it out when he was there during the early hours of the fire. I asked him what that was like. He said: Well, there were flames in front of me and flames behind me. The water was running low. My communications were going out. He said it was “the closest thing to hell I can imagine.”

One family in Altadena who all lived on the same street lost three homes. What was once a dream to live so close to each other had turned into a nightmare.

Over the past week, we have seen firefighters—exhausted and yet unyielding—waging war to save communities and lives and property.

And in the last few days, we have seen some hopeful signs as the level of containment—particularly of the Eaton fire—has increased; more slowly, the containment of the Palisades fire. But we are not out of the woods.

We have seen neighbors helping neighbors. We have seen Angelenos opening their doors to strangers left with little more than the clothes on their back.

These are the angels who remind us that even in our darkest hours—through smoky skies and uncertain times—we do not stand alone because what makes this city of Los Angeles so extraordinary—what makes California extraordinary—is that we are not defined by our tragedies; we are defined by our response to them.

In Los Angeles, resilience is a way of life. It is what has allowed the city to rise from the devastation of earthquakes and floods and riots and fires time and again. And we are stronger, more resilient, more united, more compassionate.

This is a moment when we can and must call ourselves to the better angels

of our nature—the angels that are all around us: the paramedics who rescued and evacuated seniors from a nursing home at the edge of a fire line, the volunteers I met who showed up at a shelter ready to help before anyone even asked, the father who stayed behind to try desperately to keep his son alive.

In the coming weeks, after the fires are extinguished, we will seek answers. We must not do so for partisan gain or seeking fault; in fact, just the opposite because only with the truth about what went right and what went wrong can we arrive at solutions.

I remember talking to one woman who lost her trailer in the Palisades. She wants answers about the lack of water to fight the fires. I want to know that too. I want to know if the Federal and State resources we are fighting to procure will be enough to stop the next potential megafire. I want to know what we can do to rebuild and rebuild with speed so the neighborhoods that we lost can be reclaimed by the neighbors who have been displaced, and communities can come together once more.

I am grateful for the Governor’s efforts to streamline the permitting process so people can begin to rebuild and rebuild quickly. And I want to know if there is anything more that we can do or could have done to save more lives and more homes. We should all want that.

We should all want to rebuild because Los Angeles is one of our Nation’s great cities. And to rebuild, we will need your help without fanfare or partisan rancor.

We need your help. Just like we worked together to help rebuild New Orleans and Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina, we must do so again here. Just like after countless hurricanes struck Florida and the South, we rushed in aid. Just this year, after Hurricane Helene, FEMA is still on the ground in North Carolina helping those in its destructive path. And we won’t leave—we can’t—until the job is finished. That is what we must do here.

During my time in Congress, I have seen a lot of disaster aid bills. Never in my time have I ever considered whether an area votes red or blue. When people need help, we get them help. When people are fighting to rebuild, we help them rebuild, period. It cannot and should not change no matter who is President, no matter who is in charge of Congress, no matter who the Governor is or who their Senators are.

That is my urgent plea today. We need your help desperately.

Southern California, we will rebuild. We will. But whether we can do so quickly will depend on the actions we take in the next few months.

This big and beautiful diverse city is not just made of steel and stone but of people—people who stand together when the skies turn dark and rise together when the smoke clears.

We are going to rise again because it is who we are. And when we do, we will show the world what it truly means to be the “City of Angels.”

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California

Mr. PADILLA. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSAGE OF
WATER FOR THE WORLD ACT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, some people in the Chamber who served in the Senate may remember my predecessor Paul Simon of Illinois. Simon was ahead of his time on so many issues, including the importance of clean drinking water and sanitation for the poorest people in the world.

He wrote a book called “Tapped Out.” He autographed this copy and gave it to me in 1998, many years ago. It certainly was not a New York Times best seller, but Paul wrote about what he said was “The Coming World Crisis in Water and What We Can Do About It.” I read this book and reflected on it over the years.

Some 30 years have passed. How many times do people talk about clean drinking water and sanitation? It is so critical to public health and so critical to development. Sometimes, we are looking for a big solution, a complex solution, when a simple solution is the first thing that is needed. Paul Simon realized that and that focusing on providing clean drinking water to some of the poorest places in the world can be transformative.

He understood that to avoid conflict between nations, to keep girls in school and reduce infant mortality, to improve health and economic opportunity, you have to provide people with access to clean water. Data supports this. Each dollar spent on clean water and sanitation returns between \$4 and \$8 in economic health and other benefits, which is why I decided to do something about it as a Member of the U.S. Senate.

I knew his family, I knew Paul, and I knew the last thing in the world he ever wanted was someone to build a statue of his image for future generations. But he would have been happy with perhaps the bill that I introduced entitled the Paul Simon Water for the World Act, legislation that built on an earlier law to improve access to clean water and sanitation around the world. Former Representative Earl Blumenauer and former Senator Bob Corker, a Republican in Tennessee, were my partners on this bipartisan effort.

Ten years ago, the legislation passed the Senate unanimously—something that is almost unimaginable today with the politics we live with—but that underscored the true urgency and importance of this issue. Not only was

this legislation the right thing to do, but it made access to clean water and sanitation for the world's poor a development priority for the United States.

As a result of the bills that I introduced with my colleagues and sustained bipartisan funding over the last 13 years, American leadership has provided first-time, sustainable access to clean water to more than 76 million people and access to sanitation to 58 million.

I can remember a visit I made years and years ago to Port-au-Prince in Haiti. It is one of the poorest places on Earth, and of course, it is in our hemisphere. A lady who is a medical doctor and administrator of a clinic wanted to show me something. They had been having trouble with waterborne illness, and a lot of people were sick. Some children were dying.

She said they then decided to build a cistern of pure water and to protect it and make sure the village could draw from that water when they needed it. She said it has changed everything. The kids aren't dying. People aren't sick. Things have improved dramatically. She walked out to show me a sewer lid and a pump on it. She said to me, We got this from the United States. It had something to do with a man named Paul Simon. I laughed almost out loud, thinking for goodness' sake. I said, How much did you have to invest in this?

She said \$15,000. That is \$15,000 that has saved lives and had made a difference, and it was in Paul's name, I was happy to report.

This is incredible work, and I want to salute my staffer Chris Homan, who has traveled around Africa and parts of Asia to see these investments. They do make a dramatic difference in the lifestyle of people, giving them dignity, giving them life, giving them a future.

Another such story is from a rural area of Ghana where these kinds of programs have already eliminated waterborne illnesses. We can see, when visited this project, that the investment—this small investment—by the United States made an affordable and sustainable infrastructure that families can use for sanitation options and safe drinking water. The two have to go hand in hand.

This investment made a project where a disabled woman lives a place where she can find dignity, as the name suggests, for she no longer has to crawl through snake-filled fields to use the river.

But this lifesaving work is far from done. As the climate crisis worsens and industrial needs increase, ensuring global access to clean water supplies is as important as ever.

The book might not have been a best seller, but the idea sure was. And I sure hope that we continue this modest investment in villages around the world that literally saves and transforms lives.

Around 2 billion people on this planet Earth still lack access to safe drinking

water, so I hope this historically important, bipartisan investment will continue long into the future ahead of us. Lives depend on it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

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Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, if you believe we should be able to detain and deport undocumented immigrants who have committed serious crimes and you took Republicans at their word that the Laken Riley Act was necessary for us to do that, you need to know that is already Federal law. We can and do already detain and deport immigrants who commit serious crimes, and we are not about to change that.

But Republicans have been ignoring the policies we already have on the books to push for a bill that, in its current form, is more extreme, expensive, and broad than it first appears. I am very concerned that without serious amendments, this bill is rife with unintended consequences and powers that could be abused.

As written, it will drastically undermine civil liberties in this country. It will throw our immigration system into absolute chaos by undermining any President's authority to shape Federal policy. It will cost tens of billions of dollars. And here is the kicker. It will end up punishing legal immigrants and diverting resources from detaining true threats to public safety.

First off, let's talk about how extremely broad the language of this bill is. Under this bill, you don't have to be found guilty of a felony to be detained and deported. That is a huge attack on due process. All you need is to be arrested or charged, regardless of whether that is something as small as shoplifting a candy bar, regardless of whether it may become clear that you are innocent, regardless of whether this happened years or even decades ago, and even regardless of whether you are a child.

So let me just underscore that because it is important. This bill has no exemption for kids, no cutoff age, no process to keep it in line with our general child welfare laws. As written, this bill appears so broad that a child could be locked up and put on a plane without their parents. With such sweeping language, I am deeply concerned the Trump administration could abuse this law to deport Dreamers or our farmworkers or other essential workers who, again, may never be convicted of a crime.

And to be fair, it is not just Trump I am worried about because this bill is an open invitation for Republican State officials to dictate individual case outcomes regardless of ICE, derail national immigration policy, and even disrupt international relations.

Under this bill as written, any State attorney general could wreck major humanitarian relief pathways like temporary protected status for Venezuelan or Ukrainian nationals. They

can seek court orders to deport individuals without signoff from ICE. And in some cases, they could sue to halt visas from entire countries.

That is a policy that, by its design, will end up punishing the people who are following the law to enter the United States legally. It could punish refugees who are fleeing violence. It could punish people who come here to engage in trade and in commerce that helps our economy grow. It could even punish American citizens if they are hoping to get a visa for their spouse.

With a Federal immigration system that is already too chaotic and complicated, just wait until any State AG can overrule ICE, undermine the President, and throw thousands of legal—legal—visa applications into limbo.

The bill also promises these lawsuits priority, which could be a huge burden on our courts. And if that weren't counterproductive enough, not only would this bill as written punish legal immigrants, it will also divert resources we need to detain genuine threats to our public safety. If ICE is required, as this bill says, to spend resources detaining nonviolent—not even convicted—shoplifting cases and the like, they will have their hands tied as resources are stretched thinner and thinner by an overwhelming number of minor cases, leaving them with fewer and fewer resources then to tackle the most serious cases.

That is especially concerning because DHS already does not have anywhere near the resources to implement this bill. ICE would need, actually, more than three times the current number of detention beds—a 265-percent increase—for this bill. It would need to execute 80 removal flights a week, almost double its current capacity, not to mention it would need to double ground transportation.

That all adds up to ICE needing to nearly double its staff, hiring over 18,000 additional people. And to give you a sense of how unrealistic that is, historically, DHS hasn't been able to onboard more than 1,000 people a year.

And to give you a sense of how expensive this is, ICE estimates it will need more than triple its budget in year one—really, closer to four times their current funding level. We are now talking up to \$83 billion for this legislation over the first 3 years to implement it. That is more than the annual budget for the entire Department of Homeland Security. That is a lot of money to spend on a bill that is going to cause chaos, punish legal immigrants, and undermine due process in America, all while drawing resources away from true threats.

Make no mistake, there are serious challenges we have at our border. There is a serious need for sensible immigration reform. But being tough on immigration does not require us to forsake our bedrock principles like due process or our moral obligation to keep children safe. It does not require us to ignore our common sense and waste crucial resources.

So while I hope to work with my colleagues to improve this bill, as I try to improve every bill that I can, I have to say, we have a long road ahead to address my deep concerns with the way this bill threatens due process and the potential for it to be abused.

So I strongly urge my colleagues to demand a far more serious amendment process on this bill, but more than that, I urge them to demand a serious, bipartisan approach to tackling immigration in an effective, humane way, one that protects our country and upholds our values.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. President, on a very different topic, I wanted a chance to talk today about one of the nominees that is coming before us because, when I was a very young girl, the polio vaccine was approved, and to this very day, I remember my mom saying: Thank goodness. We can now send our kids to school and not have to worry they will get sick, be paralyzed, or have to live in an iron lung or worse.

The relief was overwhelming. That is why the fear is so overwhelming now that Donald Trump wants RFK, Jr.—an outright, unapologetic, anti-vax conspiracy theorist—as our Nation’s Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Now, I want to be clear. I will not be shy about making my concerns quite plain with the American people. That is part of our Senate’s role to advise and consent to the President’s nominees. It is our job to vet these nominees and put them through a rigorous process to determine if they are qualified to serve.

That is why I met with RFK, Jr., yesterday, so I could be direct with him about my concerns with his anti-vaccine record and so I could discuss the other challenges our Nation faces where HHS has a really crucial role. I do appreciate his time, and I appreciate the opportunity to look for areas of common ground. But as I have said already, I oppose his nomination because, regardless of any other views he holds, his long history of explicitly anti-vaccine activism is utterly disqualifying.

And I am not the only one who is worried. Even Trump’s former FDA Commissioner, Scott Gottlieb, has said RFK, Jr.’s agenda “will cost lives in this country.”

I mean, just imagine if RFK, Jr., was Secretary when COVID struck. We still might not have vaccines. After all, he called the COVID vaccine the “deadliest vaccine ever made.”

This isn’t a case where we can just look for areas of agreement or hope for the best—maybe drug costs or maybe healthy food. We are talking about a conspiracy theorist who is openly antagonistic to public health and who will have tremendous authority over Americans’ lives and their healthcare.

It is not asking too much to have a Secretary of Health who believes in healthy food and believes in vaccines, especially when we are already back-

sliding on vaccines and seeing real and deadly consequences.

We eliminated measles in 2000, but last year we had 16 outbreaks. Whooping cough has spiked in the country and in my home State of Washington. Polio—even polio—is making a comeback. These are dangerous diseases, and RFK, Jr., would let them spread through our communities and schools like wildfire. And as any parent knows, when a bug goes around a school, it doesn’t stop there; it comes home to Mom and Dad and baby brothers and sisters, who could be at serious risks.

So I am here this afternoon to talk some truth to the American people about the stakes here and lay out the facts for anyone who might not appreciate the serious threat posed by RFK, Jr.

Maybe you think: Well, he is not talking about vaccines like polio or measles, or: He is only asking questions. Except, know this: He founded a nonprofit entirely focused on attacking vaccines. RFK, Jr.’s nonprofit has made videos promoting falsehoods about vaccines and autism and sowing distrust in vaccines, especially among the Black community.

They tried to revoke the emergency authorization for kids’ COVID vaccines. They sued against measles vaccine requirements, even amid measles outbreaks.

And it is not just RFK, Jr.’s nonprofit that should raise alarm here. He has said he doesn’t know if the polio vaccine caused more deaths than it prevented.

Or another example: The HPV vaccine has led to a huge drop in cervical cancer. RFK, Jr., suggested it increases cancer risk.

And let’s not get cute here with excuses like, well, he is just asking questions, because when he says we need to know vaccines are safe, he is ignoring the centuries of research we have already done on these vaccines. We do know they are safe.

What is more, he has not just been asking questions. These are statements I am going to give you that RFK, Jr., has made. These are in his own words. He has said:

I do believe that autism does come from vaccines.

He said:

They get the shot, that night they have a fever of 103, they go to sleep, and three months later their brain is gone.

Again, he said the COVID vaccine was the “deadliest vaccine ever made.”

These statements are not just false; they are irresponsible, and they are disqualifying. Given his track record, we cannot just hope that if RFK, Jr., finally gets power to undermine vaccines—a cause that he has, by the way, dedicated considerable time and money and effort to—that he will just give that up. That is not believable, especially when we know the lawyer helping him put together a team has tried to have 14 different vaccines pulled from the market himself—including, by the way, the polio vaccine.

And if you are thinking, well, he can’t really do anything about vaccines, you need to think again. If confirmed, RFK, Jr., would have tremendous power to undermine vaccines. He could influence FDA’s approval of medicine and drugs. He could directly appoint people to CDC’s vaccine board, which influences vaccine coverage and costs.

He said he will fire top researchers by the hundreds and pause infectious disease research for years—a threat far beyond vaccines, I would say.

And let’s not downplay the fact that, as Secretary, he would have one of the biggest megaphones in the world to spread anti-vaccine misinformation.

Maybe you are someone who thinks: So what if we have more whooping cough, or: A lot of people had measles, but they lived. I realize some people probably think like that because they have never seen the reality of these terrible diseases because vaccines have been so effective.

A nurse recently shared online what whooping cough can do to a baby, what she has watched families go through herself. I will warn you: It was soul crushing. First, the baby can’t stop coughing—not even to eat, not even to breathe.

Then come seizures and strokes, then a breathing tube and a ventilator, and finally a machine to take over failing heart and lung function, and then they die. That is horrific. That is whooping cough, and it is far from the only disease at risk of a comeback. We don’t want that to happen here in this country or around the globe.

Let’s talk about measles. It is one of the world’s most contagious diseases. It is easily spread by coughing and sneezing. It lingers in the air for hours. You are contagious 4 days before you develop a rash and 4 days after. Now, before the vaccine, millions of people caught measles annually, meaning thousands were hospitalized, hundreds died, most of them young children.

But this is not just history. Do you want to know what RFK, Jr., would do as Secretary of Health? I want you to look at Samoa. Before Samoa had a measles outbreak, he was there—he was there propping up vaccine deniers and falsely blaming deaths on the measles vaccine. After Samoa had a tremendous measles outbreak with over 100 hospitalized and at least 83 dead, mostly kids, no apology from him, no admitting he was wrong. Instead, he doubled down and wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting vaccines were part of the problem.

That is who we want to put in charge of our Nation’s healthcare? What do we think is going to happen? How many outright lies are we going to tolerate? How many deaths before we realize this nonsense is dangerous?

And, look, the vaccine lies just scratch the surface here. This is someone who won’t accept that HIV causes AIDS. This is someone who thinks chemicals in the water might turn people gay; he said that. This is someone

who thinks 5G wireless is being used to “control our behavior.”

This is not someone we in the U.S. Senate should be telling the American people to trust on healthcare. He is not someone we should be handing the levers of power.

For that matter, the same goes for some of Trump’s other healthcare nominees who have ignored science and promoted false conspiracy theories. His nominee to lead the CRC is an anti-abortion extremist with zero public health experience—unless you count peddling the conspiracy theory that vaccines cause autism or promoting junk healthcare plans. Then you have Dr. Oz, who has been named to lead CMS—someone who is known for pushing quack treatments and debunked junk science, who will be shaping health coverage for millions despite clear conflicts of interest.

I cannot drive home enough to the U.S. Senate: This is not a game. These are not political roles without consequence. They have real power over whether Americans can get basic information and healthcare.

I want to end on this note, and it is important. Vaccines save lives. That is not a question. It is not a slogan. It is a fact. If you cannot accept that fact; if you cannot be honest with the American people about it; if, when parents look to you, worried about their newborn, wanting to do what is best for their baby, trusting your advice as a public health leader, if you cannot tell them the same truth that centuries of science and experience tell us, which is that vaccines are safe and effective and lifesaving, then you have absolutely no business leading the Department of Health and Human Services. None. That should not be up for debate.

A vaccine denier should not be our highest ranking healthcare official.

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.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. 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 Wisconsin.

GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, I think by now you have seen all kinds of different versions of this depressing chart of total U.S. debt.

Back in 1998—and we will be talking about that year—when Bill Clinton was President and we had our first budget surplus since 1969, the debt level was about \$5½ trillion.

When I arrived here in my first year in the Senate in 2011, the debt was about \$14 trillion. I ran, quite honestly, because we were mortgaging our children’s future.

I will talk a little bit about 2014 when President Obama had a certain spending level that was up to \$17½ trillion.

As recent as 2019, before the pandemic, our debt was somewhere around \$22½ trillion.

Today, our debt exceeds \$36 trillion on a path toward much higher heights.

If you look at President Biden’s final budget here, he is predicting our total debt will be \$52 trillion in 10 years. This is clearly not sustainable. As I said, this is a depressing reality.

The result of all that debt—one of the many results—was the devaluation of the dollar. A dollar you held in 1998 is only worth 51 cents today. We have basically cut the value of a dollar in half since 1998. In 2014 when President Obama was President—now the value of that dollar is only worth 74 cents. The value of the dollar prior to the pandemic, 2019, is now only worth 80 cents. That is why people can’t afford things.

This inflation caused by massive deficit spending—this is the stealth tax on every American. It is a very regressive tax. It primarily hurts people at the bottom part of the income spectrum. Wealthy individuals have stocks, and they have other assets that inflate as the dollar devalues. So, again, this harm primarily affects lower income Americans. The men and women who work are harmed by this.

This can’t go on. This is an outrage. This is a tragedy.

I just want to ask a bit of a hypothetical here before we talk about this chart. Let’s say you are an American family of four, and you are doing pretty good. You make and you spend about \$100,000 a year.

Let’s say the next year, you have a serious illness in your family, and all of a sudden, you have major medical bills totaling \$50,000. So the next year, you spend \$150,000.

Well, let’s say you get some good news. That medical condition is now solved. Your family member is healed. What would most American families do? If their income level stayed the same—around \$100,000—I don’t think they would keep spending at a \$150,000 level. They certainly wouldn’t borrow \$50,000 to maintain that spending level. They would reduce their spending level back to what it was before the illness, right? It would go back to somewhere around 100,000 bucks, maybe a little bit more based on inflation. That is not what the Federal Government did. This, I know, is shocking most Americans as I am laying out the reality of the situation. In 2019, prior to the pandemic, total Federal Government spending was \$4.4 trillion. Then we had COVID, and I think we very unwisely shut down a lot of our economy. It destroyed people’s businesses. It destroyed people’s lives, our miserable failed response to COVID. It cost a lot of money. So Washington went on a massive spending spree, and in the year of the pandemic, we spent actually closer to \$6.6 trillion.

Now, again, if it would have been like a normal family, once the pandemic passed, we would have returned to

some reasonable spending level, but we didn’t do that. The last 5 years now, we spent, on average, \$6.5 trillion. That is \$2.1 trillion more than we spent in 2019. There is no justification for that.

This last year, we spent a total of \$6.9 trillion, \$2.6 trillion—\$2.5 trillion higher than the \$4.4 trillion. Again, there is no justification for that.

So the question I have been asking is, How do we return to a reasonable, prepandemic spending level?

I will guarantee you that the people who voted for President Trump do not expect the Federal Government is going to continue spending at President Biden’s and the Democrats who have been in charge, at their spending levels. This is unacceptable. It is unsustainable.

So what I have done is, I have laid out a couple different options here. Again, I will use another analogy. Let’s say that same family of four I was talking about with an income of \$100,000, let’s say they have a baby. Now their population, their family size, has increased 25 percent. I think most people recognize that if that family of four could increase their income 25 percent, from 100,000 to 125,000, and then tack on an amount for inflation—let’s say it is 3 percent inflation—up to 128,750, I think most people would recognize now that family has been kept whole. They have been made whole. They have been able to maintain their standard of living.

Well, I think the same thing would be true for the Federal Government, for Americans living within America, you know, looking at different benefits the Federal Government bestows on Americans as it extracts our hard-earned tax dollars.

So I went back to a number of different years prior to the pandemic. I went back to 1998. Again, that was the first year we actually had a budget surplus since 1969. That is how irresponsible the government has always been. But back in 1998, what a magic moment. We actually had a budget surplus. That was under Bill Clinton. We spent \$1.7 trillion.

That is obviously too low because we have had inflation, because we have had population growth. So what I have done in each one of these scenarios here is I have taken the basic spending levels. I have increased them based on population growth and inflation, plus I exempt Social Security, Medicare, and interest. And I have plugged in President Biden’s 2025 budget amounts for Social Security, Medicare, and interest.

So the result of that analysis for 1998, for Bill Clinton’s spending level—I don’t think anybody would really argue that Bill Clinton spent too little in 1998—if you did that, the increase would be based on population and inflation, plus you use today’s 2025 Social Security, Medicare, and interest expense, you would end up with \$5.5 trillion.

Now, it is not a secret. The reason I chose 1998—I looked at all of these

years. Doing that with 1998 spending levels, if you compare that to President Biden's budgeted revenue for this year, which has not decreased because of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act—the revenue has consistently increased to \$5.5 trillion—we would have a balanced budget. What everybody says is impossible to achieve, going back to Bill Clinton's spending levels, increasing them by population and inflation and using today's Social Security, Medicare, and interest expense would balance the budget. We wouldn't have to increase the debt ceiling. We wouldn't be experiencing or threatened by more inflation.

OK. If that is too reasonable for Washington, DC, let's look at another scenario. Let's take a look at Barack Obama's—President Obama's—spending levels in 2014. Again, I don't think President Obama was spending too little in 2014. I was here. He was spending too much.

But if you take his 2014 levels, inflate them by population growth since then and inflation, using today's Social Security, Medicare, and interest, we would be spending \$6.2 trillion this year. Pretty reasonable. Not a balanced budget, but a whole lot better than the 6.9 or the \$7.3 trillion that President Biden budgeted for this year—a far more reasonable spending level.

But if you don't like that, if that is just too reasonable, too aggressive for you, just go back to 2019 when we spent \$4.4 trillion, increase it by population growth, inflation, using President Biden's Social Security, Medicare, and interest, it would be 6.5. I mean, I think that is completely unacceptable. That has been the average.

If we increase that \$2.1 above the \$4.4 trillion, it would still be a whole lot better than President Biden's 7.3 trillion or last year's spending of \$6.9 trillion.

How can anybody justify spending at this level when we were only spending \$4.4 trillion 5 years ago?

Here is what I am suggesting. Set those other scenarios aside. President Trump was just elected. Again, I don't think anybody—certainly not me. I voted for President Trump. I was not expecting President Trump, and I do not expect him, to come into office and accept and spend at President Biden's levels. So I would encourage President Trump to go back and take a look at the final budget he proposed for fiscal year 2021 and look at his estimate for spending in 2025.

So I have done the exact same thing. I am using the fiscal year 2025 estimates from his last budget, but I am using this year's Social Security, Medicare, and interest expense. If we do that, we are looking at a spending level of \$6 trillion.

So, again, we can look at individual expense items. You can take a look at defense, if you don't think we are spending enough on that, if it is too risky a world. I mean, somewhere with-

in the range of 5.5, which would literally balance our budget, up to 6, \$6.2 trillion, that is a reasonable base that we ought to include in a budget we will be passing this year, and that should drive future spending. That would reset spending levels to a far more reasonable level.

Again, let me just reemphasize, whether we use Bill Clinton's 1998 spending level, which would result in a \$5.5 trillion baseline; Barack Obama's 2014 spending levels, which would result in a baseline budget of \$6.2 trillion; or President Trump's final budget, which would result in a \$6 trillion spending level, that is a reasonable approach.

That is what families do. That is what businesses in America are forced to do. They don't just say: Spend whatever you want. Put 70 percent of our spending budget on automatic pilot. We will never look at it. We will just spend whatever we want.

That is how you bankrupt a family. That is how you bankrupt a business. That is how we are mortgaging our children's future. It has to stop.

So I am putting everybody on notice. I am on the Budget Committee. I am on the Finance Committee. I am going to insist that the budget we pass now that Republicans are in control of the Senate returns to some reasonable baseline.

Listen, I am reasonable. I will negotiate. I am not saying this is gospel; this is etched in stone. But President Trump, our majority leader, our majority leadership, House leadership, they are going to have to justify to me how you would justify spending more than these reasonable baselines.

I ran in 2010 because we were mortgaging our children's future. I remember doing parades, shouting that. "We are mortgaging our children's future." It is immoral. It has to stop. We are spending 24, 25 percent of GDP at the Federal Government level. That is not the vision of our Founding Fathers, of sovereign states where government is primarily at the State level, at the local level, where it is close to the people, where it is more efficient, it is more effective, and it is more accountable.

Now Washington is gobbling up all of our resources, borrowing these vast amounts of money, devaluing our currency. They are not solving problems. They are not reducing poverty. They are not making lives better. They are putting American lives at risk.

And as Government grows, our freedoms recede. And Americans have to understand that of all the things that have made this country great, the men and women who have worked and built this marvel of a nation, the one essential ingredient they have always used is just that, freedom. It is freedom that allowed them to dream and aspire and build and create this marvel of a country. It is freedom that will allow these young people sitting in front of me here to do the same thing.

But as long as government continues to grow, those freedoms will necessarily recede. It is a direct relationship. So we have allowed government to grow way too large. It influences far too much of our lives, negatively influences it.

We need to jealously guard our freedom. We need to jealously reclaim our freedom. And the best way to do that is to shrink the size, the scope, and the cost of the government and its influence over our lives. And the only way you do that is you have to reduce total spending by the Federal Government. This is the metric. We talk about all kinds of things. That is the metric.

And one final point: We are not going to be able to tax our way out of this. We don't have a taxation problem; we have a spending problem. I want to make my final comment, the refuting of the false narrative that we hear ad nauseam from the other side. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act did not cause our deficits. When the CBO scored that, the score at the time it passed was that it was going to reduce revenue and increase our deficits by \$1.5 trillion. And CBO then after passage, I think April of 2018, projected out revenue for 10 years. If you take a look at that revenue from 2018 to 2024, we actually have the actual results. They projected about \$27 trillion worth of revenue over that 7-year period. The actual amount of revenue we raised from 2018 to 2024 was \$28.7 trillion. We beat CBO's estimate by \$1.7 trillion. So if the original score is 1.5 trillion—it was—in 7 years, we actually beat their estimate by 1.7. We paid for that tax cut in 7 years, plus \$200 billion.

And we had the severe COVID recession in the middle of that. So don't believe anybody that tells you that Tax Cuts and Jobs Act caused our deficits. They didn't. They paid for themselves in less than 7 years and then some.

We have a spending problem in this country. There is no justification for going from \$4.4 trillion to \$6.5 trillion, and now we are at 6.9 with no end in sight.

This is immoral, what we are doing to our children. We have got to get this under control, and this is about as good a rationale, as good a justification for setting some dollar limit and using the budget process unlike we have ever used it before, not just for being able to pass some kind of reconciliation package with a mere majority vote but actually use the budget the way American families and American businesses do to set the spending limits.

And then ask our committees and the chair of our committees to take those budget caps seriously and figure out how they can structure spending, how they can structure these programs to actually live within those budget caps, and, again, if they actually used Bill Clinton's 1998 spending level and inflate it the way I have done here, actually balance the budget.

That is what the people who came out in November voting for President

Trump, that is their goal. That is their expectation. I suggest we live up to their expectations.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Senator from Kansas.

TRIBUTE TO TOM BRANDT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, for the past 8 years, I have benefited from the service, hard work, and loyalty of my communications director and deputy chief of staff Tom Brandt.

Tom has worked in three congressional offices and is well-known and respected in the Senate by reporters, staffers, and my colleagues. His career as a staffer on Capitol Hill is concluding, and I am sad about that; but he will continue serving the American people as he pursues one of his other passions, and that is a passion for space exploration and NASA.

I want to express my gratitude to him for his service to the people of Kansas and to me. Tom is from Oakland Park, KS, and comes from a long line of Kansans. He embodies Kansas values of hard work, determination, and generosity, and I know he learned these traits from his role models, his parents Carl and Nancy Brandt.

You have raised a great son, and I thank you for that.

His career on Capitol Hill began in Missouri Senator Roy Blunt's office, first in the House and then in the U.S. Senate. He earned Roy's trust early on as a driver. That is how we often meet some of our best members of our staff. And he, too, maintained a relationship with Roy during his tenure here in the U.S. Senate. I asked Roy to tell me something about Tom, and he said:

Tom Brandt came to work for me in the House and was such an asset that I asked him to join our Senate press team. Tom always understood how to take advantage of the moment and the value of a clear message. I know Senator MORAN and his office will miss Tom when he leaves as much as we did.

Tom's career took him to work on various campaigns and, eventually, back to Capitol Hill where he worked for Kansas Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins during her time as the House GOP conference vice chair.

It was in her office that Tom was able to first pursue his passion for NASA. Lynn provided me with some thoughts, in her words, that she wanted to share about Tom:

Tom is one of my all-time favorite coworkers.

When I asked her—this is me talking now—when I asked her whether I should hire Tom Brandt, she said: He is the best I ever hired.

He is hardworking, honest, intelligent, kind and funny. Tom has a deep appreciation for his home State of Kansas and served it extremely well in his time in my office.

That is Lynn Jenkins speaking.

But, in many ways, it was his penance, as you see Tom is perhaps the worst kind of traitor a native Kansan can be—he chose to attend college at the University of Missouri. Tom's interest in NASA and space policy is lifelong.

Again, Congresswoman Jenkins speaking.

Years ago, when he worked as my communications director, he requested to handle my office's space legislative portfolio. Given I represented a district with no NASA presence and didn't serve on any committee of jurisdiction, no one [in our office actually handled that topic.] In response, my Chief of Staff told Tom, "Sure, go for it, but it never comes up." Tom did take it and immediately reached out to NASA staff. Soon after, he set up my office's first of many interactions with NASA.

That is the end of Lynn Jenkins' quote.

After working in the House and private sector, Tom began working in our office in 2017. It became evident to me early on that one of Tom's greatest strengths is his ability to quickly build friendships and collaborations. He can quickly put folks at ease with his warm smile and personality. I always thought that smile, he was smirking at me every time I saw him. I got accustomed to that smile as something much better than a smirk.

He will take the time to talk with frustrated constituents to assure them they have been heard and that he will do his best to help. And Tom always follows through on his promises.

The relationships he formed over the years expands from everyone—House Members, U.S. Senators, staff in both places—and these relationships have aided Tom in his work.

Early on in his time in my office, he took a trip to Taiwan and established relationships with officials he met in the Taiwanese Government, and he maintained those relationships after returning home. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Taiwan generously offered to send face masks and personal protection equipment to the United States. Tom reached out to his individual friends he had made, and he asked them if any of that equipment could be sent to Kansas to help the hospitals that were in desperate need. Tom's request resulted in Taiwan sending 100,000 surgical masks to Kansas.

In a moment of great need, Tom found a way to bring help and aid to the people of his home State.

In his role as communications director—I expected a lot of press to be sitting in the Gallery, but I see none. In his role as communications director, Tom has been a steadying hand helping me untangle my own thoughts and express my positions in a way that is more clear and winsome.

When I have had to speak after taking an unpopular stand or something that had caused me to be misunderstood—either on policy or legislation—Tom always had my back, advocating for me and my positions, even when he had to face the anger of those who disagreed.

He has helped clear the way for tough but important legislation. I would highlight one, the Empowering Olympic and Amateur Athletes Act that was born out of our investigation into the abuses of gymnasts and other American athletes.

He has shown compassion toward veterans suffering from illnesses as the result of their service, and we worked together to pass the PACT Act to help those who had encountered Agent Orange and burn pit victims.

And he has always shown grit and determination, working through the night on many occasions, helping me find exactly the right words to say to express my position to my constituents and the world.

As an Eagle Scout, Tom lives by the Eagle Scout motto: "Be prepared." He is always prepared with the right answer and for the tough questions from reporters, like the time a reporter reached out to see if "Senator JERRY MORAN was playing golf with Vice President Pence." Tom, in all his wisdom, responded, "Mike Pence golfs?"

Again, he has the gift to communicate.

While I congratulate Tom on his new job at NASA, his absence will be felt not only by me and by our team but by his many friends and colleagues on Capitol Hill.

Tom, we will miss your communications and policy expertise, your humorous quips and one-liners, your loyalty to the Kansas City Chiefs and Red Friday, and, above all, your friendship and passion for making the world a better place for Kansans and Americans.

I will miss, Tom, our nearly daily walks as I come over here to vote. It is a difficult job to be a comms director for a Senator who almost always shies away about visiting with reporters. Thanks for helping me explain my errors and celebrating our accomplishments. You had no responsibility for the errors and a great deal to do with the accomplishments.

Thank you for doing your job so well—pretty good for a Mizzou grad.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—AMENDMENTS

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to talk about the impact of the Laken Riley bill upon children here in the United States of America and to suggest that we have a debate over several amendments designed as to how to more appropriately treat our children who reside here in the United States so we do not end up doing significant injury to them, which I very much believe is going to be the result if we proceed without some changes.

But let me start just by noting that my thoughts are—as I think the thoughts of every Senator are—with Laken Riley's family.

Whenever there is a tragedy—no tragedy should happen, whether it is perpetuated by a citizen or it is perpetuated by an immigrant. Americans should be safe in their communities. It is absolutely clear that we need comprehensive, commonsense immigration reform.

Here in the Senate, Democrats and Republicans worked together back in

2013 to pass just such a bill—an enormous investment in border security 12 years ago, approved in this body by Democrats and Republicans together. That bill never got a hearing in the House of Representatives. So I hope we will, in fact, try to resurrect the spirit that inspired us 12 years ago in this coming year for comprehensive reform.

This particular bill is very troubling in how it impacts children. I am troubled that a bill of such consequence and, quite frankly, legal complexity was brought to the floor without going through a committee. Really, here in the Senate, the way to do responsible work on complicated, consequential bills is to have them go before a committee so the committee can bring in all the experts necessary to resolve disputes and misunderstandings about how the bill might work. From that common understanding, needed reforms can be implemented. But here on the floor of the Senate, where often only one or two of us are here at a time, there is no such consideration. We can't bring experts to the floor here to resolve these issues.

My colleague from Alabama is here today, and when I propose that we consider certain amendments, I anticipate that she is going to object, although I will try to persuade her otherwise with the logic of my presentation. But I would say that the core point stands that this bill is consequential, it is complicated, and the potential impact on children is dramatic. So let's work to prevent something really awful from happening here in our country because I know that is not the intent of my colleague.

This bill as written requires ICE officers to detain individuals who have neither been charged nor convicted of a crime—neither charged nor convicted. Children imprisoned without being charged or convicted of a crime—that is what this bill does.

In the current system, children can be, in fact, detained, but it is at discretion on the front end and discretion on the back end to understand the whole of the circumstances. Is the individual a flight risk? Does the individual pose a risk to the community? Are we talking about an assault with a deadly weapon or are we talking about grabbing and eating an apple while walking down the aisle of a grocery store? That discretion is obliterated in this bill.

If a 5-year-old girl in either of our States—I am from Oregon, and Senator BRITT from Alabama—gets hungry and grabs that apple, the Laken Riley Act says that young girl, if arrested, must be put into an ICE prison—must be, without discretion—and there is no provision in the bill to get that girl out. There is no required review.

This is an obliteration of everything we understand about due process. A child arrested but never charged because there was, in fact, in the end, no evidence—no conviction because since there is no evidence, there is no trial—is still sitting in prison without recourse, in an ICE prison.

This is not the America I know, and I don't believe this is the America my colleagues across the aisle want. So I come here to say let's work together to fix this bill. That is what we are looking to do today.

I have three amendments. I will explain each of the amendments before I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment so that the amendment can, in fact, be debated and voted on.

The first amendment excludes children from this bill. If the idea is that mandatory detention should apply to adults, then let's exclude children. Children would still be subject to potential detention that exists under the current law at the discretion—in fact, under current law, they can be detained with discretion even just for an arrest, before they have been charged or convicted, but there is discretion involved.

I know of no case in which there has been permanent, mandatory imprisonment of a child who has only been arrested and never charged and never convicted in the entire history of the United States of America, and we are about to change that. That is wrong.

So, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment so I can offer my amendment No. 73; that there be up to 15 minutes for debate on the amendment; and that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on the amendment without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mrs. BRITT. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, with all due respect to my colleague from Oregon, he voted against even proceeding to this bill. Now he is attempting to force amendments onto the bill outside of the bipartisan amendment process that we are working through.

Look, I get it. I understand the frustration when your caucus is working and your bill doesn't get called up to be voted on. But the truth is, we are working diligently to make sure that all voices are heard.

I also find it really interesting because for the past 4 years under the failed Biden-HARRIS administration's open border policies, I have not seen one bill be brought to the floor from this side of the aisle to really focus on what is happening to children as a result of these policies.

If you look at our wide-open border, we have had over 468,000 unaccompanied children come across our border in the last 4 years. When you look at the numbers that HHS has put out, they admit to losing at least 85,000 children. Where has the outrage been?

My colleagues and I on this side of the aisle have been diligently bringing this to the forefront time and time again, even holding our own version of a hearing because we couldn't get our

Democratic colleagues to shine light on this. How dare they step out of line with Biden and HARRIS and their open border policy and agenda. How dare they. They should have. We did, and we will continue to make sure that we speak up for these kids.

When you look at what is happening to migrant children being trafficked, in many cases, from drug trafficking, to sex trafficking, to stories that are absolutely gut-wrenching and heart-breaking, something has to be done, and it begins with making sure that we have accountability and that we are taking criminals off our streets.

It is not just migrant children who have paid the price for the failed policies of this last administration; it is American children as well.

Look at 12-year-old Jocelyn Nungaray in Texas, who was brutally raped and murdered by two men who never should have been here. Look at Laken Riley, who last Friday would have celebrated her 23rd birthday had she still been on this Earth. Had this bill been enacted, Laken Riley would still be alive.

This bill is a lifesaving bill. This bill protects children.

We are going to continue to fight to expose the detrimental impact of the Biden-Harris open border policies, and we on this side of the aisle look forward to joining with those on the other side of the aisle who are willing to make commonsense, targeted reforms to keep Americans safe.

Because of that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. My colleague laid out quite a set of factors there, but let's not blur the picture. The picture is this: A child came here when they were 2 months old. They have been here for 12 years or 14. They walk out of a store with a group of children. A police officer thinks they saw them put something into their pocket and arrests them. It turns out they didn't put anything into their pocket. Nothing was in there, but they have been arrested. Now ICE is required to indefinitely imprison that child—that child in Alabama who was going to be a great, outstanding member of their school and of their community—sentencing that child, with no charge, no conviction, no crime, to prison. We know exactly what harm that type of imprisonment does.

That is what this amendment is about. I can't take on all of the other issues, but I will say that last year, we had a bipartisan group develop a comprehensive bill, and my colleagues across the aisle blocked it from coming to the floor. But that was last year's debate.

This is a bill that has a purpose, but I don't think the purpose is to wrongly, indefinitely, mandatorily imprison innocent children. So I would ask my colleague, while you are objecting now, let's continue this conversation because it is that important to fairness in America.

There is a legal difference of opinion currently, so I am just going to describe that. It was sold on the House side by saying that there is a settlement called the Flores settlement which will continue to protect children and prevent this from happening—an innocent child indefinitely detained in prison with no review process.

But let's turn to the counsel for Flores. The counsel for Flores has put out a detailed statement. I have a copy. I understand that other lawyers may have other opinions, but these are the experts.

They say: The Flores settlement does not apply to undocumented children in the community. It applies only to children detained in Federal immigration custody by DHS under Customs and Border Protection or Immigration and Customs Enforcement in certain circumstances and so on and so forth. "Neither the Flores Settlement, nor any other existing legal protection, would prevent undocumented children from being mandatorily detained by ICE under the Laken Riley Act" as it is currently written.

It goes on to note and explain that the Flores settlement is a consent decree, and law, Federal law, trumps consent decrees.

It goes on to say that "children, including toddlers, are not exempted from the Laken Riley Act" and that "24 states have no minimum age for prosecuting children," meaning you can be arrested at any age, even a toddler.

So I will ask my colleague not, again, to consider granting consent for this amendment, but I would ask that you work with me to explore this topic and see if we can fix this problem to our mutual satisfaction so we don't do harm to children, if you would consider doing that.

Mrs. BRITT. I will always work with you to talk about how we can help children—always.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you.

We are in the same hallway over in the Hart Building.

Mrs. BRITT. Neighbors.

Mr. MERKLEY. I look forward to cooperating on many topics, but this is perhaps the most important one at the moment.

A second amendment that I have creates some of the flexibility that exists in current law that doesn't exist under this bill. It requires DHS to employ what is referred to as the best interest standard for the child. This is a standard that is used in virtually every single State in the foster care and child service industry.

And so the amendment reads—it is nice to have very short amendments. It requires DHS to only detain children in a manner consistent with the best interest of the child and that does not abrogate, modify, or replace protections for children in applicable Federal law, regulation, court orders, and decrees—in other words, preserving the flexibility that exists in current law,

which means could be detained but that a judge can consider the totality of the circumstances, the level of the crime, whether or not there is a flight risk, whether or not there is a potential harm to the community.

The best interest standard seems like an appropriate thing to apply when we are, in fact, collectively striving for the best interest of the children.

So I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment so that I may offer up amendment No. 72; that there be up to 15 minutes for debate on the amendment; and that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on the amendment without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Alabama.

Mrs. BRITT. Mr. President, reserving my right to object, we have repeatedly confirmed with ICE that all existing consent decrees would continue to apply. This amendment addresses something the bill doesn't do.

And as I have said, the Laken Riley Act would protect kids. It is bipartisan; it is targeted; and it is common sense. That is why we want to keep it that way. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I do disagree with my colleague because this bill eliminates the flexibility in the current system to consider the totality of the circumstances, and restoring the best interest standard that every State is intimately familiar with is remedying the lack of flexibility in the bill as it is written.

But again, we will continue this conversation. I view coming to the floor and having this dialogue as kind of a way for us to do something that is too rare—way too rare—here in the Senate. We rarely have these types of conversations in front of the American people, and I think it is important we have them, especially when there is some value—that maybe we share the same value but have different interpretations of how that value will be impacted. I am sure we share the same value on trying not to do kids wrong. That is why I value this dialogue with my colleague, and I hope it will lead to the opportunity to resolve these issues.

I have a third amendment, and the third amendment is related to another aspect of the way children are affected, including American citizen children.

Imagine the parent who goes to work who is accused—I don't know—of stealing a tool out of the factory, and so he is arrested or she is arrested. And now, under this bill, that adult has to be locked up—no flexibility on the front end—even though it turns out that they did not steal the tool; they had nothing in their bag that they had with them. The officer thought they did; they didn't. They never get charged. They never get convicted so there is no trial. They are charged. But that par-

ent who has maybe one, two, three, four American citizen children at home waiting for them—they come home from school, and no parent comes home. They have to be locked up under this bill.

So we are not just talking about an impact in this bill on immigrant children. We are talking about an impact on citizen children. Now, I care about both, but I just want to note that there has been a conversation about this bill as if it only affects immigrants. No, it affects American citizens too. It affects spouses who might be American citizens. It certainly affects the children who are likely American citizens.

So this amendment says that if an adult with children under 17 is subject to the mandatory detention that currently has no end, no back end to it, has no ability to appeal—it is permanent detention, permanent imprisonment—that if they have children at home, after 30 days, there would be a court proceeding to consider whether or not the conditions should exist for release after the normal set of issues are considered, such as is this person a danger to the community; is this person a flight risk; can they be released with bail—the same things we have now—because back at that home are a bunch of children, maybe noncitizen children, maybe citizen children, but a bunch of children who are going: My parent never came home. I am not just a latchkey kid with a parent coming home at 10 p.m. because that is when their shift ends; I am a kid who doesn't know what the hell to do now, and my life has been shattered.

So this would create the opportunity for that flexibility that exists in current law after 30 days of mandatory detention. I think it is an appropriate way to address the potential for impact that I am sure no one intended in writing this bill, which was to leave a bunch of children back in a home with no parent and no support.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to set aside the pending amendment so that I can offer amendment No. 71; that there be up to 15 minutes for debate on the amendment; and that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on the amendment without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Alabama.

Mrs. BRITT. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, we have heard a lot of things that are untruthful about this bill today. First off, no one's due process is taken with regard to their immigration proceeding that may be moving and the ability to see the criminal proceeding through to the end.

At the end of the day, we have to make a decision, and that is the decision that is in front of my colleagues right now. Are we going to protect open border policies or are we going to protect kids?

I mean, we are seeing, even in this conversation about carveouts and

whatnot—you have got teen migrant gangs running rampant in New York City, allegedly running theft rings, with children as young as 11.

Think about what you do when you think about each one of these things we have discussed today. If you were to carve out a certain kid or a certain age, you don't make that kid safer; you make them a greater target for the drug cartels, for the people looking to move crime.

We have to make sure that we are taking a commonsense approach to this. And at the end of the day, if you don't commit a crime, you are going to be good.

So I am here today to say it is time to pass the Laken Riley Act. It is past time to do that—having a commonsense, targeted approach that, no, does not fix everything.

I hear my colleague's frustration with regard to regular order of last year. I would like to echo that. You think about what we are dealing with right now. We have had over 11 million people come across the border under the Biden-Harris administration. Some people say that number is much higher. There are at least 2 million that came across the border that we don't know who they are, where they are going, or what their intentions are.

You look at the nondetained docket we have here in our country—7.8 million. You look at those who have been given their due process—1.4 million have been issued their final orders of removal, meaning they have been given their due process, and we have said: You have no legal right to be here.

We have got to do better at tackling every bit of that, and doing better starts today. We are not only going to do right by Laken Riley and her legacy; we are going to do right by the children of this country, making it safer and more secure. That is exactly what this bill does. It is a bipartisan piece of legislation, and we must keep it strong and keep it that way.

So on that, Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I was hoping those last two words weren't "I object." But this is an important issue that has been raised, and we need to look carefully because there is no intention to leave a houseful of children home alone when the parent poses no flight risk, has committed no crime, poses no risk to the community, and those children are being harmed.

In fact, I do take factual dispute with a few of my colleague's points. She noted that no due process had been taken. When you eliminate the discretion on the front end, you change due process. A judge can no longer say this person is no flight risk, no risk to the community, has children at home, so we will put a high bond. They will absolutely show up. We know where all their relatives are. And that will be best because, if the person is subse-

quently charged, they will be there for trial.

That due process is stripped away on the front end. There is due process in existence now on the back end, where a person can challenge their detention and whether or not they should be there.

In fact, during the previous Trump administration, there were children who were released with such challenges, but that is taken away. So, yes, due process is dramatically changed, with a huge impact on children.

And my colleague mentioned that we don't want children to be targeted for gangs. Amen to that. Who is more of a target for gangs than children left alone in the home because their parent has been unjustly imprisoned? That does exactly the opposite of what my colleague wants to achieve.

So I know this conversation will continue; at least, I hope it will. We are now under a filed cloture motion, which means the majority intends to close debate probably on Monday, and yet one Democratic amendment has been heard—one. The majority leader has said he wants to do things differently; that he wants there to be an amendment process.

The amendment process I saw when I first came to this Senate consisted of standing up and saying: I have a relevant, germane amendment. I am asking for the existing amendment to be set aside so that mine can be brought up, which puts it in a queue for consideration. People can study it. And then you go to a whole series of votes on all those things that are in that queue.

We did this on Dodd-Frank. We did this on ObamaCare. I think we should do it here because the consequences are high. But if that can't be done, then I would ask my colleague who has worked so hard on this particular bill to take a look at whether the Republican side will agree to hear these amendments and vote on them. They may be voted down, but I think they are important.

I think it is extremely important that kids not be wrapped up in this. They can currently be detained, but it is with discretion of the circumstances. I think it is particularly important that we have a standard for children in terms of their best interest. I think it is particularly important that we have a way, after a few weeks, to have some look at whether children who have been left home alone—and if the circumstances are appropriate and there is no flight risk, the circumstances are appropriate and there is no community risk—to help address that situation or we are harming children this was never meant to harm.

So I ask for my Republican colleagues to consider providing an opportunity because they—it takes 100 percent. Every single Senator has to agree to hear an amendment.

We used to have the Senate code. The Senate code was: I won't object to your amendment. You don't object to mine. They are on the topic before us.

These are on the topic before us. These are not some crazy thing. These are addressing core due process issues that affect children. So I would ask that at least they get some discussion for the possibility of consideration.

I thank my colleague from Alabama for coming and hearing me out as well as—I am not really thanking you for objecting, but I am thanking you in the spirit in which I think you want to do the right thing.

And I will keep striving to convince you that the right thing here is we should debate these amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

TRIBUTE TO KATHLENE ROWELL

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, it is nearing the end of the week, and normally, that is when I come down to the Senate floor to do my weekly—I try to make it weekly—Alaskan of the Week speech.

Now, I know for the pages, this is their favorite speech of the week. You get to hear about Alaska; you get to hear about some great Alaskan doing some great stuff. I usually try to give a little update about what is going on in our great State because it is always something interesting. And then I encourage people watching on TV: Come on up to Alaska; you are going to have the trip of a lifetime if you do it.

So today the Alaskan of the Week is someone very special to me and my wife. I am going to talk in detail about all she has done for our State. Her name is Kathlene Rowell. And she has worked for me in Alaska going on 15 years. The Presiding Officer understands that as a former Governor, where you have great staff that do amazing things, not just for you and your team but for the whole State.

Her title in the office has been deputy State director, but she has been so much more than that. She has literally been the glue that has kept my whole team together, not just since I have been in the Senate but even before I became a Senator.

So I am going to talk about Kathlene real quick here in a minute as the Alaskan of the Week. She so much deserves it. Just wanted to mention a few things.

We are all, of course, praying for the people impacted by the fires in California. We are all ready to stand by to help. The States are coming together. My State is certainly a State that understands natural disasters, and, you know, even in Alaska right now, Anchorage just last week—didn't make any news down here—was hit with hurricane-force winds on Sunday, up to 130 miles an hour. A lot of people—hundreds—were without power, a lot of property damage. So, you know, we are thinking about our Alaskan colleagues who were hit by that hurricane—there is no other word—typhoon.

And, of course, praying for everybody in Los Angeles. You know, with a State and population that big, we all know people. I have a good college roommate

buddy of mine Tom McMillin, my two sisters-in-law Janine and Jennifer, they are all being real negatively impacted by that. So we are thinking about them.

In Alaska, I always like to give an update. The Sun is actually coming back. We hit the winter solstice. In Anchorage, we are gaining about 4 minutes of sun a day; in Fairbanks, we are gaining about 5 minutes of sun a day; and in about a week, January 22, the Sun will rise again in Utqiagvik, AK—Barrow, AK—the top of North America. That will be the first time the sun comes up over the horizon in 2 months. So they get a dark winter, and it is cold up there.

The Iditarod, the Last Great Race, is coming up March 2. If you are thinking about coming to Alaska, don't think just this summer. Come up in the winter, too; it is great. So that is a little bit of update to tell what is going on.

Now, back to Kathlene Rowell, the rock in our office whose last day—oh, it breaks my heart, breaks my wife Julie's heart. Her last day was yesterday.

So little bit of background about Kathlene. She moved with her family to Alaska from Chicago when she was 3 years old. Her father worked in the oil fields and had been commuting to Alaska, Illinois, Chicago—back and forth. He thought it was time for the family to come together, so they settled in beautiful Eagle River, AK, a gorgeous—and I mean gorgeous—patriotic community, mountainous community right outside of Anchorage.

Kathlene went to Chugiak High. Go Mustangs. She was an excellent, driven student. Anyone who knows Kathlene knows that "excellence" is her motto. Everything she does is excellent.

But we got confirmation from her good friend Robyn Engibous—on my staff, my deputy chief of staff here in DC—who went to school with Kathlene and remains very close, that, yes, Kathlene was a straight-A student. We knew that. She showed horses. She worked at the coffee shop in Eagle River called Jitters, a mainstay in that great community. She excelled academically.

Went to college first in Colorado, then in Washington State. Did a semester with the National Outdoor Leadership, which she loved, and then came back to Alaska, finished up, and graduated from Alaska Pacific University which, very importantly, she did well there. But really, really importantly, she met her husband Ben who is a great guy. Great guy. They are a great couple.

So that is Kathlene's early background. She then worked in the parks division, division of parks and rec, right at the department of natural resources. That is when I first met her. I was the new commissioner at DNR—we call it DNR in Alaska; that covers everything in Alaska. We worked in the same building. I was a brandnew commissioner, and I was looking for a spe-

cial assistant—a young, smart, talented, special assistant—as the commissioner of the department of natural resources.

Now, this is a big job, right? If Alaska were its own country, it would be the envy of the world in terms of resources, strategic location, critical minerals, our military, you name it. DNR has a lot of responsibility over all these things.

Matter of fact, not to go on a tangent here, but I had an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal today titled "Greenland Is Nice, but Alaska Is Better." Goes into all this stuff about how great Alaska is.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Wall Street Journal Op-Ed, "Greenland Is Nice, but Alaska Is Better," be printed in the RECORD at the end of my remarks. Just to give you a sense of our great State there.

So I needed a special assistant. And I was looking at all these resumes and these lawyers and stuff, and here, for the young pages, this is the value of what they call an elevator speech. You have heard of an elevator speech, right? You have to make a pitch; you have to make it quick. So I am getting on the elevator, Kathlene at the time she is probably mid, early twenties. She is very young-looking, so then she looked a lot younger than her early twenties.

And she gets on the elevator, and, boy, oh, boy, it was the elevator pitch: Commissioner Sullivan, I understand you are looking for a special assistant.

The elevator is going up, all these people are listening; I believe I have the qualities, the hard work, the ethics, the commitment to excellence to be your special assistant. I would like to come by your office and interview.

Boom, the door opens. I was like, dang, that was impressive. Elevator pitch. So she made that. Came in, interviewed, and I am like, I am hiring her—none of these gung ho, high-falutin lawyers; I am going to put my trust in this young Alaskan. And, boy, oh, boy, I am so glad I did. It was the best elevator pitch I have ever seen.

Kathlene rolled up her sleeves and learned everything she could, and before you knew it, she was running the department of natural resources, which in Alaska is the giant organization of hundreds and hundreds of people, the key to our economy.

She was working with my other special assistant John Katchen. She was hugely essential to the things we got done at our department of natural resources. We negotiated against ExxonMobil for a giant natural gas deal. You want to talk about a tough thing. Exxon brings in like 25 lawyers to negotiate against a group of 3 of us, right? We took them down.

She organized summits. She helped us redo our State's oil tax regime, which is creating a big spur of development right now. Kathlene was essential in all of this, bringing more producers up to Alaska, a great teammate. Her heart was in serving our State.

Fast-forward a few years, I am going to run for the U.S. Senate—not an easy run. A lot of good Republicans in the primary. There was a Democrat incumbent here; that is never easy. And the first person I said I am going to hire on my campaign team, first person, was Kathlene.

Now, it was a risk. She had a 1-year-old at home at the time, Benjamin, who is now joined by his brother Niles. By the way, Kathlene is a great mom. Her boys are now 12 and 8. When she first started working for me, she had no kids. She has got a beautiful family with her husband Ben and her two wonderful boys.

But it was a risk. She had a great State job, and she is going to, you know, join this guy throwing his hat in the ring. You know, I am not so sure it was looking like an easy deal, but she left her easy—not easy—her secure State job, the first person I hired on my campaign. Organized it. Traveled. And I am pretty sure I would not have won without Kathlene's great work. That was in 2014.

And then she stayed in our office in Alaska, became the deputy State director. And you know how it is, she has been with me and my team, my wife, longer than any other staff member, and she has done an incredible job.

Now, we all know how important staff are, both here in DC and especially back home. They work hard. Let's face it, you know, government jobs aren't always the best: You certainly could probably be making more money in the private sector; the hours can be grueling. But great staff, they are vital to what we do.

They are vital to the work that we get done here in the Senate, in DC, and really vital back home where the work they do for our constituents and the places they travel to are essential. They are essential.

And here is a big thing: As you know, the help that our offices back home do to work for the people we are honored to represent is vital because there are so many giant Federal Agencies—Social Security, the VA, IRS, the Department of Defense, Immigration—that are giant labyrinths that people don't know how to get through.

Our Federal Government can be unwieldy and often unforgiving. So when Alaskans need help on all those things—Social Security checks; VA benefits, we are the State with more veterans per capita than any State in the country; Medicare; the IRS comes screwing up something—they come to us and we work on these cases.

This is a rough number, but since I have been in office, our Alaska staff has worked on more than 12,000 of these cases, and they are really complicated and take hours and hours. We always have at least one person attached to these cases, something they will always remember, and their lives are impacted by whether they are resolved in a good way or bad way.

And as I am sure you probably believe, you don't always hear about this

part of the job of representing people in our great Republic; but in my view, it is probably the best part of the job because you have a direct impact on someone you represent, and you can literally change their lives.

We do that, we put our heart and soul into it, but nobody has put their heart and soul into it more than Kathlene. She has made all of this happen, 12,000 cases.

Now, I also have a fantastic director of constituent services in Anchorage, Carrie Keil, who has completed more than 3,600 of these cases herself. She is amazing. But here is what Carrie said about Kathlene: Kathlene is at the helm of the ship. She is the captain of the ship. She makes all of this possible. She is a master communicator. Her loyalty and integrity to the people of Alaska are unmatched.

That is what you want with great staff.

Margaret Sharpe, she runs our Mat-Su Valley regional area, our regional director, Margaret, who does a great job. She calls Kathlene our hero: She is our conscience. She is the gatekeeper of decorum. She is all about kindness and respect. She keeps all of us kind.

Isn't that a great compliment? That is from Margaret on my team.

Elaina Spraker, another great member of my team, our Kenai regional director on the Kenai Peninsula. Covers Kodiak as well. Elaina does a great job. She says that she has never worked with anyone with more skills than Kathlene. Elaina says, "Kathlene is our rock," and I agree. That is so true.

You know, in our line of work, in elected jobs, whether Governors or commissioners or Senators, we all know that certain people have an impact that goes way beyond just the work that they do, and Kathlene is one of those. She has worked so hard, often at the sacrifice of time with her beautiful boys and family and her husband. But she set the bar so high on professionalism, in excellence, in everything she does that everybody around her—in our Anchorage office, in our Alaska offices, in our DC offices—everybody around her, myself included, gets lifted up and made better and has improved by being in Kathlene's orbit. Those are special people, and that is what Kathlene is.

Now, she has been a loyal employee, certainly to me and my wife Julie. There was a little going-away party for her back home in Anchorage, 2 days ago. Fortunately, Julie was able to make it. But throughout all, it is not just loyalty to us. It is to the people of Alaska, to helping people, to helping our State move forward.

And, as I said, yesterday was Kathlene's last day. She is going to bring these same skills to a really great credit union in Anchorage—their gain, our loss—but she is always going to be a member of Team Sullivan.

Kathlene, we all say staff is like family here, but Kathlene truly is like family for me and my wife Julie. We

definitely would not have gotten this far without her. We are going to miss her terribly.

So, Kathlene, thank you. Thanks for your great work. Good luck in your new job. From the bottom of my heart and Julie's heart, thanks for all you have done for me and Julie, our office, our State, our country. And, of course, I hope you are honored by one of the most prestigious awards anyone can get in America by being our "Alaskan of the Week."

Congratulations, Kathlene. Godspeed. There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From The Wall Street Journal, Jan. 15, 2025]

OP-ED: GREENLAND IS NICE, BUT ALASKA IS BETTER

(By Sen. DAN SULLIVAN)

There's been a lot of talk about President-elect Trump's idea of buying Greenland. But one U.S. state offers all of Greenland's benefits: Alaska. The problem is that the Biden administration has spent its time trying to turn the Last Frontier into a giant national park rather than recognizing it as a great strategic asset.

Greenland would provide the U.S. a gateway to the Arctic. But America is already an Arctic nation thanks to Alaska. The Russians and Chinese know my state is at the forefront of great-power competition. In the past two years, there have been 12 air incursions into the state's air-defense identification zone, including an unprecedented joint Russian-Chinese strategic bomber operation, and large-scale joint Russian-Chinese naval task forces in our waters.

Greenland plays an important part in missile-defense and early-warning networks, but the cornerstone of America's missile defense is Alaska. Any missiles launched by Russia, China or North Korea against the U.S. would likely fly over the state. That's why it hosts the vast majority of America's radar systems and ground-based missile interceptors. To create an Iron Dome for America—a priority of Mr. Trump—we need to add to our national ballistic-missile interceptor capability in Alaska and build a robust layered missile defense and space-based missile sensor capability.

Greenland is rich in minerals and energy reserves. Alaska is even richer. Our state holds an estimated 40 billion barrels of oil and roughly 235 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. In one field alone, Prudhoe Bay, Alaska reinjects into a reservoir for oil-production purposes as much natural gas each day as Oregon, Washington and California consume.

Alaska also has a wealth of metals and other minerals, some of which are essential for our national defense, economy and renewable-energy sector. President Biden worked to keep them in the ground. The first Trump administration approved a road needed to access one of America's richest mineral deposits, the Ambler Mining District in Alaska's Interior. The Biden administration killed that road last June. Then Mr. Biden traveled to Angola to announce \$600 million to build a railroad to help that country market its critical minerals.

Buy Greenland? Sure, if the price is right and the Danes are willing to sell. But as Mr. Trump prepares to unleash Alaska's potential again, it's worth remembering what the father of the U.S. Air Force, Gen. Billy Mitchell, once said: "I believe . . . whoever controls Alaska controls the world. I think it is the most strategic place in the world."

Mr. SULLIVAN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS RULES OF PROCEDURE

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, rule XXVI, paragraph 2, of the Standing Rules of the Senate requires each committee to adopt rules to govern the procedure of the committee and to publish those rules in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD not later than March 1 of the first year of each Congress. Today, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs adopted committee rules of procedure.

Consistent with standing rule XXVI, I ask unanimous consent to have a copy of the rules of procedure of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs printed in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

PURSUANT TO RULE XXVI, SEC. 2, STANDING RULES OF THE SENATE

RULE 1. MEETINGS AND MEETING PROCEDURES OTHER THAN HEARINGS

A. Meeting dates. The Committee shall hold its regular meetings on the first Wednesday of each month, when the Congress is in session, or at such other times as the Chair shall determine. Additional meetings may be called by the Chair as the Chair deems necessary to expedite Committee business. (Rule XXVI, Sec. 3, Standing Rules of the Senate.)

B. Calling special Committee meetings. If at least three Members of the Committee desire the Chair to call a special meeting, they may file in the offices of the Committee a written request therefor, addressed to the Chair. Immediately thereafter, the clerk of the Committee shall notify the Chair of such request. If, within 3 calendar days after the filing of such request, the Chair fails to call the requested special meeting, which is to be held within 7 calendar days after the filing of such request, a majority of the Committee Members may file in the offices of the Committee their written notice that a special Committee meeting will be held, specifying the date and hour thereof, and the Committee shall meet on that date and hour. Immediately upon the filing of such notice, the Committee chief clerk shall notify all Committee Members that such special meeting will be held and inform them of its date and hour. (Rule XXVI, Sec. 3, Standing Rules of the Senate.)

C. Meeting notices and agenda. Written notices of Committee meetings, accompanied by an agenda, enumerating the items of business to be considered, shall be sent to all