

Let me give you an idea of what this would equate to and what it would compare to in the physical space. Let's just say that our counties and cities and States and the Federal Government decided that anybody ought to be able to go buy alcohol, tobacco, or drugs anytime they wanted to. Whatever you want to do, go do it. And kids as young as 7 or 8 years old would go and buy alcohol or drugs or go experience pornographic shows. You can't even take a kid into an X-rated or R-rated movie. But let's just say all those laws were stripped. That is what is happening in the virtual space because we do not have those protections in place.

It is so deeply disappointing to me that we have some in the House who say: Let's not worry about it. Let's not put any restrictions. Do you know what? That ought to be left up to parents and teachers and preachers to police this.

What if in the physical world you took away all of those laws? What if you said: We are not going to protect children. What if you said: We are not going to, as a society, put any constraints at all on minor children.

There is a reason children are referred to as "minors." There is a reason they don't get a driver's license until they are age 16 and they can't vote until they are 18. There are reasons we have laws to protect those that are vulnerable, to take care of our children. As you look at what came through the House version, it weakens the standard to prove that big tech companies have knowledgeable harms on their platforms. We know there are harms. We know they have done the research. We know this exists. We know that there are executives who want to bury their heads in the sand and play dumb. They think the American people are dumb. They think they are the gods of Silicon Valley. But do you know what? People have figured this out. They love their kids, and they want the Federal Government to do something about this—to establish standards, to exercise Federal preemption, and to pass the Kids Online Safety Act to make certain that children are going to be protected. Parents want to know that the Federal Government has their backs.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, when Republicans tell you over and over, over a period of generations, that they have no interest in protecting people's healthcare, you should take them seriously.

For decades, since the days of Ronald Reagan, they have argued that Medicare is socialism, that Medicaid creates cycles of dependency, that the Affordable Care Act is making healthcare more expensive when, in fact, it is doing the opposite. So you should not be surprised that, given the opportunity to extend the Affordable Care Act tax credits and prevent people's premiums from more than doubling starting next month, Republicans do not have the votes to prevent that.

Look, this is not complicated. If Congress doesn't act this month, millions of Americans will lose their healthcare next year because they simply will not be able to afford to pay hundreds of dollars more every month for the same healthcare, and tens of millions of people will be forced to cut back on groceries or afterschool activities for their kids just so they can keep seeing their doctors.

The only way—the only way—to prevent the suffering that is about to happen is to pass a clean extension of these credits. There is no other plan. There is a lot of conversation—even on the left but also on the right—about how to reform the healthcare system. Nobody seriously thinks that can be accomplished in the month of December.

If we want to have a bipartisan conversation about how to fix the American healthcare system, count me in. This thing is a mess, between managed care and all of the subsidies and all of the sort of rent-seeking and the idea that most—maybe not most of the money but a substantial portion of the money in the American healthcare system goes to people and institutions and processes that don't deliver healthcare. There is utilization management. There is billing. There are pharmaceutical benefits managers. There are all kinds of rent seekers—people in the American economy, institutions in the American economy, and publicly traded companies in the American economy that take a cut out of your money that should be going to healthcare. That is a very important point.

If there were a bipartisan opportunity to fix that, count me in; count 47 of us in. But let's not kid ourselves: No one is getting that done by next week. So the question in front of us is a little more crisp and a little more uncomfortable than "Does the American healthcare system work efficiently?" Of course it doesn't. But these subsidies allow people to stay alive. These subsidies allow people to stay insured. These subsidies allow people to afford their healthcare so they can pay their rent or their mortgage or buy their groceries.

The question in front of us is not some big abstraction about public policy. We are not at some Axios event about what we should do about the American healthcare system. The vote in front of us next week is, do you want people to pay double and triple, or do you not want people to pay double and triple?

So let's stop messing around. Let's stop pretending there is some magical solution that will emerge over the weekend. We have got 47 votes. We have got 47 votes. I take some pride in being able to count. It is a weird business I am in that being able to count is such a unique skill, but I can tell you we have got 47 votes. So what does that mean? We need 13 votes over there. I can't even find 13 people who will verbalize that they would like to avoid this spike in premiums.

We have run out of time, and if Republicans want to solve this, there is a very straightforward path.

KIDS OFF SOCIAL MEDIA ACT

Mr. President, this week, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce is considering a package of bills aimed at protecting children on social media. For years, children and families across the country have been suffering from the mental health crisis precipitated by social media platforms, and it is well past time that Congress acted.

But I want to make one thing clear: This is not a question of retooling the settings or empowering users. We know—we know—from scientific research and data, as well as anecdotal evidence from every parent, teacher, or kid, that this is too big of a challenge to be solved by tinkering around the edges.

Tech companies have specifically designed their platforms to hijack the frontal lobes of impressionable children and feed them a never-ending stream of content that keeps them scrolling for hours. That is not simply going to be undone by more algorithmic choice or more conversations between parents and children at the dinner table.

Parents are asking for a very simple thing from their government—from their government—because these things are literally built in a lab to hijack a kid's frontal lobes before they are fully formed. Their profit motive is—we all know this—the longer they linger, the more eyeballs, the more revenue, the more money, the more profitability. So the more they addict your kid, the more money they make. And these things are more powerful than a 14-year-old's brain. They just are.

So the question in front of us is not to mandate that when you go into your social media account and you are 12 or you are 15, that you have the ability to tweak the algorithm. They are not going to do it—maybe 1, 2 percent. You know, some fancy-pants kid of a professor or of a Silicon Valley magnate is going to be, like, no phones and blah, blah, blah, but the rest of us need some help from our government to protect these children.

That is why Senator CRUZ and I and many others have developed the Kids Off Social Media Act. There is no good reason—no good reason—for an 8- or 9-year-old to be on Instagram or Snapchat, and until or unless companies are mandated by law to enforce

some basic rules and stop profiting off of children, they will continue padding their bottom lines.

The Kids Off Social Media Act is not some intensely complicated piece of legislation. That is the problem in the Commerce Committee and in the Energy and Commerce Committee on the House side. There are so many smart lawyers and staffers who are going back and forth and doing 500-page bills, who tweak this and tweak that and have causes of action over it. This is what this bill does: There is a minimum-age threshold for children to get on social media, OK? Then, if you are still a minor but are permitted to get on social media—so from the ages of 13 to 18—algorithmic browsing is banned. So it is like the old Facebook where it is, like, just your friends. It is like a big group chat: “I made a cupcake.” “Look how cute my dog is.” “This is a sunset.” “I had a wipeout while surfing”—whatever. It is fun and useless but not damaging.

I promise you that parents across the country left, right, and center—TED CRUZ and I have a hard time finding areas of agreement. And I like TED. KATIE BRITT and I have a hard time finding areas of agreement. Yet parents across the political spectrum and across geography believe that the way to protect kids is to simply delay the onset of the use of social media, which we have a perfect right to do under statutory law, and then, for those minors who are on social media, to turn off the algorithm. That is what we should pass.

Some of those House bills are constructive moves in the right direction, but they are nibbling around the edges. When we send something to the President's desk, it cannot be nibbling around the edges. This is not just a mental health crisis—and it is—it is a societal emergency.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

PAROLE AUTHORITY AND OPERATION ALLIES
WELCOME

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I spoke earlier this week about the tragic incident that happened over the week of Thanksgiving here in Washington, DC, when two National Guardsmen were shot in the line of duty, and one of them died of her wounds.

Today, I would like to spend a little bit more time discussing the perpetrator of this act of violence and how he happened to be in the country in the first place.

The man who committed this crime was a 29-year-old Afghan national by the name of Rahmanullah Lakanwal. The Biden administration paroled him into the United States in 2021 as part of Operation Allies Welcome. He was not the recipient of any special immigrant visa process or processed through the overseas Afghan SIV Program. He was later granted asylum after his parole period expired.

But I would like to dwell on the word “parole” for a minute so that people

understand exactly how this shooter made his way into the United States and how he had come to stay here and commit these crimes.

Ordinarily, under immigration law, Congress would be engaged and pass certain immigrant visa legislation saying that you need to meet these criteria, these standards, in order to qualify. That is not what happened to the shooter of these two West Virginia National Guardsmen. He was paroled into the country, which means that the Biden administration simply allowed him into the country without any sort of background check or any sort of vetting.

We are more familiar with the word “parole” in the criminal law context, which comes to mind when people are released from prison following demonstrating good behavior, but in immigration law, “parole” is a provision under U.S. law that allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to allow certain aliens—and that would be foreigners—on a case-by-case basis—and that is important. It would allow certain aliens, on a case-by-case basis, to temporarily enter the United States.

Aliens who have been paroled into the United States are usually not eligible for entry into the United States or for a visa because they are barred by certain grounds of inadmissibility or removal that apply.

Parole is not a lawful immigration status or formal admission to the United States. I know this is fairly technical, but it is really important in this context. This shooter was not admitted into the United States as a result of any legislation that Congress passed or any of us voted for. It was solely done by the Biden administration and by the Department of Homeland Security during his administration.

Just as importantly, this power—this parole power—is only to be used in very limited circumstances, such as a medical emergency or because we find it is in our Nation's best interests, such as an individual alien cooperating with law enforcement or in a criminal prosecution.

Aliens who are paroled into the United States are only allowed to be here temporarily and under certain conditions prescribed by the Secretary of Homeland Security. Significantly, they do not—they do not—undergo the same formal screening process as those who apply for a green card or a visa.

Parole was never meant to be a vehicle for massive numbers of immigrants coming into the country or the sort of categorical parole done by the Biden administration, where people from certain countries were admitted by the tens of thousands, literally, each month. It is supposed to be done on a case-by-case basis.

So what I am suggesting is these sorts of categorical paroles that the Biden administration issued—including the parole which resulted in this shooter being in Washington, DC, and at-

tacking these two National Guard members—were illegitimate. It was an illegitimate use of this parole authority under U.S. law.

The Biden administration's abuse of the immigration laws, of course, is well known, and their abuse of parole authority. The very notion of mass parole is what you might call an oxymoron. In other words, it is inconsistent—mass, or categorical, and parole. There is an inherent contradiction. Using this authority illegitimately to allow massive numbers of immigrants into the country defies the very nature and purpose of this authority.

The Biden administration created a number of programs to extend parole status to immigrants from around the world. Under a program known as the CHNV, the Biden administration allowed as many as 30,000 individuals per month from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, as well as their immediate family members. They were admitted under this program of the Biden administration, again, illegitimately, using the parole authority to grant categorical or massive entry of these individuals into the United States. Under that program, they were allowed into the United States for a 2-year period of time and received a work permit. The Trump administration rightfully terminated this program in March of this year.

But that was not the only misuse of parole. After the disastrous fall of Afghanistan and the bungled evacuation, the Biden administration added insult to injury. Under Operation Allies Welcome, the Biden administration rolled out the welcome mat to Afghan nationals. As of 2023, the Biden administration had brought more than 70,000 Afghan nationals into the United States under this claimed parole authority. Again, parole is only supposed to be used on a case-by-case basis. But the Biden administration, by illegitimately exercising this authority, allowed 70,000 Afghan nationals into the country.

What that also means—and in particular relevance to this crime committed against these two National Guardsmen—is that there was not the normal sort of vetting process that you would see for refugees or anybody else coming into the country. We knew very little about these individuals, and we didn't check up on them once they got here. We didn't know whether they were criminals, whether they had ties to radical terrorist groups or anything. Of course, that is pretty consistent with the Biden administration. Their open border policies for 4 years let basically anybody and everybody who wanted to come into the United States in, including people who were determined to commit crimes and do us harm.

For some of these parolees, the U.S. Government under the Biden administration even allowed them to collect cash welfare benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income, SSI; Temporary Assistance for Needy Families,