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Senate

(Legislative day of Tuesday, March 16, 2021)

The Senate met at 10:30 a.m., on the expiration of the recess, and was called to order by the Honorable MARTIN HEINRICH, a Senator from the State of New Mexico.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Father in Heaven, bless our Senators. May they strive to act with integrity. Guide them to listen to the voice of conscience, seeking to please You with their motives as well as their actions. Lord, give them such ethical congruence that their words will be validated by laudable actions. Test their hearts with Your unfailing love, empowering them to become instruments of Your peace. Mighty God, keep their feet on solid ground.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 17, 2021.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable MARTIN HEINRICH, a Senator from the State of New Mexico, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. HEINRICH thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

PPP EXTENSION ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, in a second, I will move the PPP bill to the floor. I hope—and I ask our Republican colleagues to cooperate—that we can move this bipartisan PPP proposal without delay. It passed the House overwhelmingly. A vast majority of Democrats and Republicans voted for it. I hope we can move it quickly here in the Senate as it expires on March 31, and there are some changes that were made in the ARP that people need time to adapt to and implement. To allow a lapse would not be the right thing to do for so many of our small business people across the country. So I am hoping that our Republican colleagues will move the bill with the same alacrity with which it passed in the House with an overwhelmingly bipartisan majority. I think there were fewer than 10 votes against it.

MEASURE READ THE FIRST TIME—H.R. 1799

Mr. SCHUMER. With that, Mr. President, I understand that there is a bill at the desk, and I ask for its first reading.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will read the bill by title for the first time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1799) to amend the Small Business Act and the CARES Act to extend the covered period for the paycheck protection program, and for other purposes.

Mr. SCHUMER. I now ask for a second reading, and in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to my own request.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will receive its second reading on the next legislative day.

GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now let me proceed to my remarks.

First, on the terrible tragedy in Georgia, the people of Atlanta, GA, and the surrounding communities were just shocked last night by a series of shootings that left eight people dead, six of whom were of Asian descent.

The motivations behind this devastating tragedy are still unknown, but there is a legitimate concern that these killings may have been racially motivated. Over the past year, the Asian-American community has faced a rising tide of abuse and violence in the wake of COVID–19, driven by ignorance, by misinformation, and by age-old prejudices against the Asian-American community. Tragically, hate crimes against Asian Americans have skyrocketed.

There is bigotry in the land and far too much of it. These dark forces have always existed in America, but, recently, they seem to have been unleashed. The sort of superego that puts

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

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these things down seems to have weakened, and the id seems to have strengthened.

We cannot lose for a moment our vigilance against these forces of hate, intolerance, bigotry, and discrimination.

I love the Asian American community. They have done so much for America. I see it in my borough of Brooklyn, in my city and State of New York, and throughout the country—hard-working people, people who do so much for our country at every level. They are welcome here. That is America. Yet, bigots have increased hate crimes and maybe even possibly led to the deaths of these people.

So I hope that all Americans first will realize that there is too much hate in the land, that hate against one group is hate against any group, and we should all, Americans of every background and race and creed, color, and religion, gender, and sexual orientation, band together against the haters. It is so un-American.

E pluribus unum—out of many, one. That is what America has always been. That is what America must continue to be, and our voices must speak out.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Second, on nominations, the Senate is once again making excellent progress this week confirming President Biden's nominees. We began the week by confirming a history-making Cabinet member, Interior Secretary Haaland. Yesterday, we confirmed Isabel Guzman as the SBA Administrator. Today, we will confirm another consequential administrative appointment, the U.S. Trade Representative.

President Biden has named Katherine Tai, the daughter of proud immigrants from Taiwan, a veteran of the Office of the Trade Representative under President Obama, and one of our country's most seasoned experts in international trade. That—Ms. Tai—is what America is all about.

We welcome her. We give her a great position of authority because of her expertise. And maybe—you know, I will leave it at that. It is a great contrast to the tragedy I was talking about a few minutes ago and the ascension of another proud American of Asian ancestry here.

As U.S. Trade Representative, Ms. Tai will play a crucial role in enforcing existing trade deals and making sure that American workers, businesses, and researchers can compete on a level playing field. She will be an essential player in restoring America's credibility with our trading partners and promoting international cooperation to tackle some of the world's biggest problems, from the global pandemic to climate change.

I have not a single doubt that Ms. Tai is the right person for the job, and I look forward to the Senate giving her a well-deserved promotion later today.

FOR THE PEOPLE ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Now on S. 1, democracy reform, today Senate Democrats are introducing the No. 1 bill of the 117th Congress, S. 1, to stand up to voter suppression, end dark money in politics, and reinvigorate American democracy in the 21st century.

Make no mistake, democracy reform must be a top priority of this Congress, and I will put S. 1, the For the People Act, on the floor of the Senate.

For too long, we have let really important parts of our democracy wither. Unlimited dark money flows into campaigns. Special interests have way too much influence in Washington. And worst of all, there is a concerted, nationwide effort to limit the right of American citizens, particularly people of color, to vote.

Throughout America's history, we have seen a continuous cycle of expansions in our democracy being met all too often by vehement backlash from those who wish to maintain an exclusionary status quo.

Earlier this year, we witnessed only the latest example in the form of a violent insurrection right here in this Chamber, right here in this Capitol, an attack fueled by the insidious lies of the former President aimed at overturning the results of a free and fair election.

In the wake of the November election, one of the safest and most secure in American history, dozens of Republican-led State legislatures have seized on the former President's big lie and introduced hundreds of bills aimed at tightening voting rules under the nasty guise—the nasty, malicious, and false guise—of election integrity. These bills, sadly, are aimed at Americans of color—Black Americans, Latinos, Native Americans.

Despicable efforts to target these historically disenfranchised communities have become a central component of the electoral strategy of one of America's major political parties. Shame on them. Shame. It is infuriating. Infuriating. When you lose an election, you are supposed to win over the people you lost, not stop them from voting. That is un-American, autocratic, and against the fundamentals of our democracy, but this is happening in States all across the country—all across the country.

Maybe the most reprehensible effort is underway in Georgia, where State Republicans are trying to limit absentee and mail-in voting, make it harder to post a ballot by drop box, and disallowing early voting on Sunday, a day when many churchgoing African Americans participate in voter drives. Does anyone on the other side of the aisle think taking away Sunday voting in Georgia is not bigoted? What is the rationale? Stop it, if you want to stand for equality and justice.

Our country has supposedly come a long way since African Americans in the South were forced to guess the number of jellybeans in a jar in order to vote. But some of these voter suppression laws in Georgia and other Republican States smack of Jim Crow in the 21st century rearing its ugly head once again.

These laws and their various cousins in Republican State legislatures across the country are collectively one of the greatest threats to modern American democracy. According to a recent report in the Washington Post, these laws could strain every available method of voting for tens of millions of Americans, potentially amounting to the most sweeping contraction of ballot access in the United States since the end of Reconstruction, when Southern States curtailed the voting rights of formerly enslaved Black men.

If one party believes ''heads we win; tails you cheated''; if one political party believes that when you lose an election, the answer isn't to win more votes but, rather, to prevent the other side from voting, then we have serious and existential threats to our democracy on our hands.

This is no political dispute. It goes way beyond that to the core—the core—of what America is all about. That is why we need S. 1 so badly, a bill that would combat all of these voter suppression efforts by restoring critical parts of the Voting Rights Act; a bill that would make it easier, not harder, to vote by automatically registering American voters when they get a driver's license; a bill that would limit dark money and corruption in our politics and much more.

There are a lot of problems in our country—healthcare and climate change and income inequality—but we designed a democracy that would allow competing interests in our country to come together and agree on solutions. If our democracy doesn't work, we have no hope of solving any of our other problems.

S. 1 is going to be a top priority this Congress. We will fight and fight and fight to get this done legislatively. Failure is not an option. Too darn much is at stake.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021

Mr. SCHUMER. Now on the American Rescue Plan, I would like to continue shining a spotlight on different aspects of ARP. The legislation helped so many people and so much of the country, it is easy to forget many crucial parts of the bill. So later today, I will be joining my dear friend Representative VELÁZQUEZ from New York to talk about how the American Rescue Plan helps Puerto Rico, which is too often an afterthought in Federal legislation.

The American Rescue Plan will do three historic things for the people of Puerto Rico, American citizens all.

First, it will deliver Federal dollars to the island's earned income tax credit for low-wage workers for the first time ever.

Second, it will expand eligibility for residents to claim the child tax credit. Prior to the ARP, only families with three or more children in Puerto Rico could claim the child tax credit. Why those American citizens were treated differently than all the others was beyond me and strikes me as nasty. But now every family can.

Third, the ARP bill will add $1 billion—$1 billion—in food assistance. Residents of American territories don't receive traditional food assistance programs like those in the United States, such as the SNAP program, but instead their governments receive block grants that have been capped by the Federal Government.

The American Rescue Plan makes sure that Puerto Rico, which suffers devastating rates of poverty, 43 percent, and especially childhood poverty—an unacceptable 57 percent of all the children in Puerto Rico live in poverty. So we want to make sure that Puerto Rico receives its fair share of Federal food assistance.

The American Rescue Plan may be the greatest anti-poverty effort in a generation, and we make sure that Puerto Rico is part of it.

Now let me turn my attention to schools. One of most enduring images of the COVID–19 pandemic will be the empty classroom. For 12 months, teachers have done their level best to keep their students engaged with remote learning, but there have been incredible difficulties. Too many students don't have reliable internet. Too many parents can't be there to help young kids log on and keep up with their work. Simply put, there is no replacement for having kids in the classroom. We need to get our schools to reopen as quickly and as safely as possible.

Now, my Republican colleagues have made a lot of noise about reopening our schools, but they don't want to dedicate any resources to actually getting it done. We need money to do this. There are many more expenses under COVID.

Through the American Rescue Plan, Senate Democrats delivered the single largest investment in American education ever. We are proud of that. Proud. Let me say it again. Through the American Rescue Plan, Senate Democrats delivered the single largest investment in American education ever—ever—$170 billion to repair the damage caused by this pandemic, three-quarters of which will go directly to K–12 education, prioritizing school districts that need it the most. This will help schools update ventilation, hire more nurses and janitors, make classroom sizes smaller, and make getting kids to and from school safe.

In short, the American Rescue Plan will greatly accelerate the safe and effective reopening of schools. Once kids are back in the classroom, the American Rescue Plan will help make sure they can stay there and succeed. After what has been a lost year for too many students, this bill provides significant support for learning recovery programs—afterschool programs, summer school programs, and other resources to help kids catch up and get back on track.

Through the American Rescue Plan, we have made a life-changing investment in our students. It is one of the many ways this bill will help us recover from the crisis and come back stronger than ever before.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Last week, our Democratic colleagues had to resort to a rare tactic to rescue the stalled nomination of Xavier Becerra to run the Department of Health and Human Services.

The distinguishing feature of this nominee's resume is not his expertise in health, medicine, or administration. That part of the resume is very brief. What stands out are Mr. Becerra's commitments to partisan warfare and his far-left ideology.

He has supported the sweeping government takeover of healthcare they call ''Medicare for All,'' which would actually end Medicare as we know it and would rip away families' private insurance plans.

As the administration's policies continue to create a border crisis, Mr. Becerra is someone who believes we should not just have blanket amnesty, but that entering the country illegally should not even be a crime.

And even amid a global pandemic, the most significant health-related experience on the nominee's record is his efforts to wield the legal system against religious Sisters to make them violate their faith and conscience.

Up to now, every person who has ever been confirmed as Secretary of Health and Human Services has either been favorably reported by the Finance Committee or discharged by unanimous consent. There is ample reason why this nominee would be a glaring exception.

I continue to urge a ''no'' vote.

NOMINATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, fortunately, the Senate will first be confirming a thoroughly qualified nominee to be the new administration's top trade official.

Katherine Tai is just the kind of qualified and mainstream person who is positioned to serve President Biden and the country quite well. That is why she received broad bipartisan support from the Finance Committee and why the vote to advance her nomination yesterday was 98 to 0.

I look forward to working with Ms. Tai to embrace trade and push back on abusive practices from China and other anticompetitive countries.

Trade is a huge strength of America. It drives job creation and economic growth. Just look at my home State, for example. Exports support more than 140,000 jobs in Kentucky. Hardworking Kentuckians supply nearly 200 countries with everything from agricultural goods to medicines, to aerospace parts and motor vehicles.

In the last Congress, we modernized our trade with our neighbors to the north and south through the USMCA. We gave Kentucky farmers, workers, and consumers a long-awaited boost.

But our job creators still face unfair barriers, including those targeting American spirits. The Bluegrass is proud to craft 95 percent of the world's bourbon, but, currently, tariffs put Kentucky distillers at a disadvantage in their largest export markets.

Ms. Tai should address these unfair international headwinds facing Kentuckians. I would encourage her to focus on expanding markets and reducing barriers for products and services from all 50 States.

Americans would welcome the growth in opportunity and prosperity. And, if you ask me, the whole world could benefit from a little more Kentucky bourbon.

CHINA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, tomorrow, the Secretary of State and the President's National Security Advisor will have their first face-to-face meeting with Chinese officials. I am glad our officials met with regional allies like Japan and South Korea right beforehand and have been in touch with Australia and European allies as well. It is essential that we and our friends present a united front.

Now, the United States and the whole world need the President's team to deliver a strong message tomorrow.

During the campaign, President Biden spoke dismissively about the threat from China. But thus far, in office, his team has shown signs they understand that Communist China threatens America, our allies, and the prevailing international system.

The world spent years presuming that welcoming China into the international community would inevitably cause its rulers to play by the rules. Twenty years ago, President Clinton said: ''[E]conomic innovation and political empowerment . . . will inevitably go hand in hand.'' But since then, rather than the rest of the world exporting liberty and transparency into China, Beijing has found more success exporting authoritarianism and corruption beyond its borders.

In Japan, on Tuesday, Secretary Blinken called out the ''coercion and aggression'' that China deploys at home and abroad. He said this administration will push back on Beijing. That clear-eyed talk is certainly welcome, but it is just the first step.

Walking the walk will mean actually responding in tough ways to espionage and cyber attacks, to violations of human rights, to military bullying, to stealing intellectual property and cheating on trade. If the administration is up to the task, they will find strong partners in this Republican conference.

Here is one big test: Are they willing to keep investing in our own defense?

Our financial commitment to defending America is our most important policy lever in this competition with China. Our allies and adversaries do not heed American Presidents because they are charming or good-looking. The world has respected America for our overwhelming military and economic superiority. When that edge erodes, we invite trouble.

As a share of our economy, American defense spending has fallen significantly, not just from Cold War-era heights but even just recently. Meanwhile, China used its growing prosperity to modernize its military, develop new and longer range weapons to hold U.S. forces at risk from further away, and turn a particular eye towards space and cyber space.

Defense spending is about protecting our homeland. It is about projecting power. It is about preserving global influence, supporting our allies. It is really a barometer of our national will.

It is also about innovation and the future. Many life-changing innovations throughout our economy were first rooted in military R&D.

Unfortunately, reports suggest the Biden administration may plan to freeze defense spending. Of course, that means a reduction, after inflation. Dozens of Democrats are pressuring the administration for even steeper cuts than that. If the administration is serious about competing with China, deterring Russia, and preserving American leadership, the most important test will be in the President's budget submission.

Some of our Senate Democratic colleagues have expressed interest in crafting bipartisan legislation related to China. If any issue is ripe for a regular-order, bipartisan process, it would be that one.

Defense spending is the crucial first step, but there are a whole variety of subjects concerning our competition with China that could benefit from a serious look.

There is bipartisan support for improving security reviews of foreign investment and protecting against forced technology transfer, for cracking down on Chinese espionage and political influence campaigns, for supporting the people of Hong Kong, and human rights, and deterring aggression against Taiwan. There is bipartisan support for fostering specific industries of national-security importance, such as semiconductors, and for broadly strengthening American R&D.

There is an opportunity for fruitful discussion here. Certainly, this is an area where bipartisanship will be especially crucial, so strategies don't change schizophrenically with every election. As one of our Democratic colleagues said in a hearing yesterday, ''the U.S. will not out-compete China . . . with short-term legislation and never-ending uncertainty.''

That is another great argument for not trashing the legislative filibuster. Imagine if every action the Senate takes with national security implications were constantly subject to being wiped clean. While China plans years and decades at a time, our Federal legislation would be reduced to a shelf life of a couple years.

These issues need to be addressed thoughtfully and deliberately. Identifying critical technologies and the best ways to promote and protect advancements needs to be a smart, fact-based process, not a political guessing game or throwing cash at industries with the right connections.

Our work on this front should strengthen our ties with our allies and partners, not try in vain to simply go it alone.

And the Democratic majority must resist the temptation to pile a long list of unrelated policy wishes into a big package and try to label it ''China policy.'' It would be quite a remarkable coincidence if our Democratic colleagues' vision for a so-called China bill ends up being indistinguishable from a list of things that just happen to delight liberal interest groups.

Getting America on a stronger footing will not require some sweeping far-left transformation of our economy. It will mean continuing to complement the principles and ideas that are our greatest strengths, and it will mean working on these issues the right way, across the aisle.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

TRIBUTE TO ERIC FELDMAN

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I rise today to pay tribute to an extraordinary public servant and Michigander, Eric Feldman.

Since my first days serving in the U.S. House of Representatives more than 12 years ago, Eric has served as my chief of staff. I still vividly remember him coming to my home just a couple of weeks after my election to interview for the chief of staff position.

I was immediately impressed by his extensive knowledge of American politics and his passion to serve the people of the State of Michigan.

But to fully know Eric is to know his family's story and how it shaped the man he is. All four of his grandparents survived the Holocaust. His maternal grandmother was imprisoned in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, among others. His maternal grandfather was in a forced labor camp in Plaszow. His grandparents met and married in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. They were liberated from there and remained after it was converted to a displaced persons camp following World War II. That camp is where Eric's mother was born.

His grandparents and mother immigrated in 1949 to Detroit, where his grandfather worked as a janitor at Ford Motor Company during the day and worked as a tailor at night. His mother won a full scholarship to the University of Michigan from Ford Motor Company as part of a program for employees.

Eric's paternal grandparents fled Poland on the eve of the Nazi German invasion. They survived the war as slave laborers in Siberia, where Eric's father was born. Following the war, they immigrated to Israel before settling in Detroit. Eric's father went to Wayne State University, thanks to the GI bill, after serving honorably in the U.S. Air Force.

After immigrating to Detroit, Eric's family worked hard, and they were able to achieve the American dream. There is no question that their life experience and their journey instilled in Eric a sense of service and devotion to country.

As a freshman Member of Congress, I was fortunate to have Eric on my team. He brought with him extensive political and policy experience, having worked for Congresswoman NITA LOWEY, Leader NANCY PELOSI, and Rahm Emanuel. He built on that experience, leading our office with steady, unwavering leadership, brilliant vision, and wise counsel.

Through four reelections—including my election to the Senate and reelection last year—and many crises impacting Michigan and our country, I entrusted Eric to help ensure that we were able to come together, solve tough problems, and ultimately deliver results. He never flinched. I could always count on Eric to work with our team to develop creative ideas to tackle challenges or empower staff to make

sure that we were on the leading edge of issues critical to Michigan.

He has guided my office through countless high-profile events and crises: the great recession and auto crisis, the Flint water crisis, several government shutdowns, the COVID–19 pandemic, the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, and two impeachment trials. Through it all, Eric has provided stability and focus—a focus on working in a bipartisan manner to pass important legislation and to make progress for Michigan and for our entire country.

Last week, I was humbled to be recognized by the Center for Effective Lawmaking as the most effective Senator in the 116th Congress. Recognition of this sort does not happen without having an incredible team. Eric played a critical role in helping me enact 10 bills into law—the most of any Senator from either party over the last 2 years.

And I know that Eric will tell you, without a doubt, that there is no ''I'' in team. As a leader, Eric has focused on hiring talented staff, both in DC and across Michigan, staff that humbly, selflessly, and effectively serve the people of Michigan each and every day. With Eric's laser focus on what is best for Michigan, together with our team, we have secured record funding to protect the Great Lakes, worked to increase security at our Nation's borders, expanded apprenticeships and skills training, saved taxpayer dollars, and made the Federal Government more efficient, all the while standing up for Michigan workers, including those working in our auto industry.

Eric is always on the leading edge, and he has distinguished himself through his work with Michigan's auto manufacturers and automotive stakeholders. In particular, Eric has helped drive policy efforts focused on innovation and emerging technologies so that in the near future, self-driving vehicles will not only be safely deployed and save thousands of lives on our highways but also be developed and built in Michigan and in the United States, creating good-paying jobs for the next generation of workers.

At every step of the way, through all of his hard work, Eric has carried himself with his characteristic enthusiasm and passion. It is only fitting, as an alum of the University of Michigan and a fervent—very fervent—Wolverine fan, he has, and I quote, an ''enthusiasm unknown to mankind.'' Whether it is policy, politics, casework, or an issue important to constituents, there is no doubt that Eric approaches it with keen interest and with high energy and that he will think through every single possible angle.

But Eric has been much more than just a chief aide. Colleen and I feel incredibly fortunate not only for all that Eric has done to lead my office and deliver for the people of Michigan; we count on him as a confidant and a dear friend.

Eric, you will be missed dearly as you depart for your next endeavor in the private sector. But I am grateful for what you have built, and I know that it will endure—a culture of teamwork, hard work, productivity, and a commitment to what is best for Michiganders.

Eric, Colleen and I know that you have devoted countless hours to a job that you love while balancing the two most important roles in your life: being a loving husband and a father. I have been proud to watch you celebrate many of life's milestones over the years, including the birth of your two beloved sons, and I will certainly never forget your eldest son Avi's birthday on November 4, 2014, the day Michiganders elected me to the U.S. Senate.

Eric, Colleen and I wish you much success, and we hope you enjoy this next chapter with Dena, Avi, and Ethan. Know that Colleen and I will always be thankful beyond measure for your service and for your leadership and that you will forever be part of Team PETERS.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be able to complete my remarks before the vote.

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

(The remarks of Mr. THUNE pertaining to the introduction of S. 797 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Mr. THUNE. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks before the vote is called.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. And for the information of the Senators, I will speak for about 7 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Thank you.

GEORGIA SHOOTING

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I would like to start by taking a moment to address the awful violence we saw in Georgia yesterday.

Everyone, especially elected officials, needs to not just speak out but to act against this deadly display of hate.

To the victims and their families and to the Asian-American and Pacific-Islander community in Washington State and nationwide, my heart is with you not just today but going forward. I will continue sending a strong message that hate against you must stop, and I will keep working to ensure your safety in light of the terrible surge in hate crimes we have seen in our State and across the country.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Now, Madam President, I rise today to voice my strong support for Attorney General Becerra to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

After 4 years of attacks on families' healthcare from President Trump, after a year of this pandemic ravaging our Nation, the challenges that lie ahead of us, especially when it comes to healthcare, are numerous; they are enormous; and they are absolutely urgent.

The uninsured rate, the drug prices, and healthcare costs have all skyrocketed. Confidence in our public health agencies have plummeted. Already painful health inequities have grown deeper. And this pandemic has absolutely devastated communities and pushed our healthcare system to the brink.

COVID–19 has killed over a half a million people, and that number continues to rise. When it comes to the hard work ahead to not only end this pandemic but rebuild a stronger and fairer country, it is clear we need an experienced leader at the Department of Health and Human Services. It is clear we don't have a second to waste, and it is clear Attorney General Becerra is the right pick for this job.

His track record shows he has the convictions and the qualifications for the task at hand. As a Member of Congress for over two decades, he has proven himself a skilled legislator who understands healthcare policy. As attorney general of one of the Nation's largest justice departments, he has proven himself as a leader capable of heading a complex Department like HHS. And throughout all of his work, he has proven himself as a champion for patients and public health.

In Congress, he worked to help more people get quality, affordable healthcare by passing the Children's Health Insurance Program and the Affordable Care Act. In California, he has fought in court to defend the Affordable Care Act and time and time again has gone to court to fight for patients, like when he won a $70 million settlement from pharmaceutical companies for blocking cheaper generic drugs from market, when he won a settlement from opioid manufacturers behind the addiction crisis and joined a bipartisan investigation into whether opioids were unlawfully marketed, when he sued e-cigarette companies from marketing tobacco products to children and led a bipartisan effort with the Republican attorney general of Nebraska to protect kids from tobacco imagery, or when he worked to investigate companies and hold them accountable for putting workers at risk by failing to follow COVID–19 safety measures.

Attorney General Becerra has also worked to acknowledge and address issues driving inequities in healthcare. As leader of California's Department of Justice, he fought in court against the Trump administration rule that undermined care for the LGBTQ community, against the administration's constant efforts to undermine reproductive healthcare and against its blatant disregard for the well-being of migrant children.

Attorney General Becerra also established a new Bureau of Disability

Rights at his department, as well as a new office focused on environmental justice, including how pollution and public health hazards disproportionately hurt communities of color.

Overall, his record tells a story that is clear, compelling, and persuasive. He has fought against pharmaceutical companies, opioid manufacturers, tobacco companies and polluters and for more affordable, quality healthcare for every patient.

I have no doubt as Secretary that he will put special interests on notice and put patients and public health first and put science, data, and experts back in the driver's seat. And he would also bring an important perspective to this role as a first-generation college student and the first Latino Secretary of Health and Human Services.

He is exactly the kind of leader we need to make sure we make good on the promise of the historic investments we made in the American Rescue Plan to end this pandemic—investments to rapidly scale up testing and tracing and sequencing so we can identify new strains of COVID and slow the spread; investments to quickly and equitably get vaccines into arms, an effort that requires not just making vaccines available but breaking down barriers to access, promoting vaccine confidence, fighting misinformation, and engaging community partners; investments to build our public health infrastructure and recruit and train 100,000 public healthcare workers.

He will also be a valuable partner to Congress as we work to address challenges that predate this pandemic but have been made all the more urgent, like rooting out systemic racism and addressing inequities in our healthcare system, which have made this pandemic so much more damaging and deadly for communities of color; like addressing the mental healthcare crisis, which the trauma of this pandemic has made so much worse; like fighting the opioid epidemic, a crisis which was deadlier than ever this past year; and like expanding access to quality affordable childcare, which has become more difficult for families to get during this pandemic.

When this pandemic is over, we will need a strong leader at the Department to deal with the aftermath and with so many other outstanding issues: bringing down prescription drugs prices; making sure healthcare in this country is truly a right, not a privilege; undoing 4 years of attacks on reproductive rights and ensuring every woman can get reproductive healthcare, regardless of their race or income or ZIP Code or disability; lowering our unconscionably high maternal mortality rate; reversing the alarming trend of rising youth tobacco use; and ensuring the Office of Refugee Resettlement is upholding its welfare mission by prioritizing the well-being of every child in its care, ensuring they are treated with decency and humanity and kindness; and working to place children with suitable sponsors quickly and safely.

We have our work cut out for us, but in Attorney General Becerra, we have a Secretary of Health who is up to the job. He has the support not only of Democrats but of Republicans, as the Republican attorneys general of both Louisiana and Tennessee have spoken highly of their experiences working with him.

I urge every Senator who wants the Biden-Harris administration to succeed at ending this pandemic quickly, keeping our families safe, and ensuring everyone can get quality affordable healthcare to join me in voting to confirm him.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON TAI NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Tai nomination?

Mrs. MURRAY. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

(Mr. KELLY assumed the Chair.)

(Ms. CORTEZ MASTO assumed the Chair.)

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HICKENLOOPER). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 98, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 123 Ex.]

YEAS—98

Baldwin	Grassley	Peters
Barrasso	Hagerty	Portman
Bennet	Hassan	Reed
Blackburn	Hawley	Risch
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Romney
Blunt	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Booker	Hoeven	Rounds
Boozman	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Braun	Inhofe	Sasse
Brown	Johnson	Schatz
Burr	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	Kelly	Scott (FL)
Capito	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cardin	King	Shaheen
Carper	Klobuchar	Shelby
Casey	Lankford	Sinema
Cassidy	Leahy	Smith
Collins	Lee	Stabenow
Coons	Luján	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lummis	Tester
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Thune
Cotton	Markey	Tillis
Cramer	Marshall	Toomey
Crapo	McConnell	Tuberville
Cruz	Menendez	Van Hollen
Daines	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Moran	Warnock
Durbin	Murkowski	Warren
Ernst	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wicker
Fischer	Ossoff	Wyden
Gillibrand	Padilla	Young
Graham	Paul	

NOT VOTING—2

Hirono	Sanders

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 37, Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Charles E. Schumer, Chris Van Hollen, Michael F. Bennet, Jack Reed, Tammy Duckworth, Sheldon Whitehouse, Jeff Merkley, Christopher A. Coons, Richard Blumenthal, Patrick J. Leahy, Amy Klobuchar, Tina Smith, Brian Schatz, Ron Wyden, Robert Menendez, Richard J. Durbin, Martin Heinrich, Maria Cantwell.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 49, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 124 Ex.]

YEAS—50

Baldwin	Heinrich	Reed
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Blumenthal	Kaine	Sanders
Booker	Kelly	Schatz
Brown	King	Schumer
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Cardin	Leahy	Sinema
Carper	Luján	Smith
Casey	Manchin	Stabenow
Collins	Markey	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Feinstein	Ossoff	Whitehouse
Gillibrand	Padilla	Wyden
Hassan	Peters	

NAYS—49

Barrasso	Cotton	Hagerty
Blackburn	Cramer	Hawley
Blunt	Crapo	Hoeven
Boozman	Cruz	Hyde-Smith
Braun	Daines	Inhofe
Burr	Ernst	Johnson
Capito	Fischer	Kennedy
Cassidy	Graham	Lankford
Cornyn	Grassley	Lee

Lummis	Romney	Thune
Marshall	Rounds	Tillis
McConnell	Rubio	Toomey
Moran	Sasse	Tuberville
Murkowski	Scott (FL)	Wicker
Paul	Scott (SC)	Young
Portman	Shelby	
Risch	Sullivan	

NOT VOTING—1

Hirono

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The yeas are 50, the nays 49.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, before I begin my formal remarks, I want to pause to condemn the hatred and violence that took eight precious lives last night in Metropolitan Atlanta.

I agree with Georgians, with Americans, with people of love all across the world. This unspeakable violence visited largely upon the Asian community is one that causes all of us to recommit ourselves to the way of peace, an active peace that prevents these kinds of tragedies from happening in the first place.

We pray for these families.

Mr. President, I rise here today, as a proud American and as one of the newest Members of the Senate, in awe of the journey that has brought me to these hallowed Halls and with an abiding sense of reverence and gratitude for the faith and sacrifices of ancestors who paved the way.

I am a proud son of the great State of Georgia, born and raised in Savannah, a coastal city known for its cobblestone streets and verdant town squares. Towering oak trees, centuries old and covered in gray Spanish moss, stretched from one side of the street to the other, bend and beckon the lover of history and horticulture to this city by the sea.

I was educated at Morehouse College, and I still serve in the pulpit of the Ebenezer Baptist Church, both in Atlanta, the cradle of the civil rights movement. And so like those oak trees in Savannah, my roots go down deep, and they stretch wide in the soil of Waycross, GA, and Burke County, and Screven County. In a word, I am Georgia, a living example and embodiment of its history and its hope, of its pain and promise, the brutality and possibility.

At the time of my birth, Georgia's two Senators were Richard B. Russell and Herman E. Talmadge, both arch segregationists and unabashed adversaries of the civil rights movement.

After the Supreme Court's landmark Brown v. Board ruling outlawing school segregation, Talmadge warned that ''blood will run in the streets of Atlanta.''

Senator Talmadge's father, Eugene Talmadge, former Governor of our State, had famously declared: ''The South loves the Negro in his place, but his place is at the back door.''

When once asked how he and his supporters might keep Black people away from the polls, he picked up a scrap of paper and wrote a single word on it: ''Pistols.''

Yet there is something in the American covenant, in its charter documents and its Jeffersonian ideals, that bends toward freedom. And led by a preacher and a patriot named King, Americans of all races stood up. History vindicated the movement that sought to bring us closer to our ideals, to lengthen and strengthen the cords of our democracy, and I now hold the seat—the Senate seat—where Herman E. Talmadge sat.

That is why I love America. I love America because we always have a path to make it better, to build a more perfect Union. It is the place where a kid like me, who grew up in public housing, the first college graduate in my family, can now stand as a United States Senator.

I had an older father. He was born in 1917. Serving in the Army during World War II, he was once asked to give up his seat to a young teenager while wearing his soldier's uniform, as they said, ''making the world safe for democracy.'' But he was never bitter. By the time I came along, he had already seen the arc of change in our country. He maintained his faith in God and in his family and in the American promise, and he passed that faith on to his children.

My mother grew up in Waycross, GA. Do you know where that is? It is way 'cross Georgia. Like a lot of Black teenagers in the 1950s, she spent her summers picking somebody else's tobacco and somebody else's cotton. But because this is America, the 82-year-old hands that used to pick somebody else's cotton went to the polls in January and picked her youngest son to be a United States Senator. Ours is a land where possibility is born of democracy: a vote, a voice, a chance to help determine the direction of the country and one's own destiny within it—possibility born of democracy.

That is why this past November and January, my mom and other citizens of Georgia grabbed hold of that possibility and turned out in record numbers, 5 million in November, 4.5 million in January—far more than ever in our State's history. Turnout for a typical runoff doubled, and the people of Georgia sent their first African-American Senator and first Jewish Senator, my brother JON OSSOFF, to these hallowed Halls.

But then, what happened? Some politicians did not approve of the choice made by the majority of voters in a hard-fought election in which each side got the chance to make its case to the voters. And rather than adjusting their agenda, rather than changing their message, they are busy trying to change the rules. We are witnessing right now a massive and unabashed assault on voting rights, unlike anything we have ever seen since the Jim Crow era. This is Jim Crow with new clothes.

Since the January election, some 250 voter suppression bills have been introduced by State legislatures all across the country, from Georgia to Arizona, from New Hampshire to Florida, using the big lie of voter fraud as a pretext for voter suppression—the same big lie that led to a violent insurrection on this very Capitol the day after my election. Within 24 hours, we elected Georgia's first African-American and Jewish Senators, and hours later the Capitol was assaulted. You see in just a few precious hours the tension very much alive in the soul of America. The question before all of us at every moment is, What will we do to push us in the right direction?

So politicians, driven by that big lie, aim to severely limit and in some cases eliminate automatic and same-day voter registration, mail-in and absentee voting, and early voting and weekend voting. They want to make it easier to purge voters from the voting roll altogether. As a voting rights activist, I have seen up close just how draconian these measures can be. I hail from a State that purged 200,000 voters from the rolls one Saturday night in the middle of the night. We know what is happening here. Some people don't want some people to vote.

I was honored on a few occasions to stand with our hero and my parishioner, John Lewis. I was his pastor, but I am clear: He was my mentor. On more than one occasion, we boarded buses together after Sunday church services as part of our Souls to the Polls program, encouraging the Ebenezer Church family and other communities of faith to participate in the democratic process. Now, just a few months after Congressman Lewis's death, there are those in the Georgia legislature—some who even dared to praise his name—that are now trying to get rid of Sunday Souls to the Polls, making it a crime for people who pray together to get on a bus together in order to vote together. I think that is wrong. As a matter of fact, I think that a vote is a kind of prayer for the kind of world we desire for ourselves and for our children, and our prayers are stronger when we pray together.

To be sure, we have seen these kinds of voter suppression tactics before. They are part of a long and shameful history in Georgia and throughout our Nation. But refusing to be denied, Georgia citizens and citizens across our country braved the heat and the cold and the rain, some standing in line for 5 hours, 6 hours, 10 hours just to exercise their constitutional right to vote—young people, old people, sick people, working people already underpaid and forced to lose wages to pay a kind of

poll tax while standing in line to vote. And how do some politicians respond? Well, they are trying to make it a crime to give people water and a snack as they wait in lines that are obviously being made longer by their draconian actions.

Think about that. Think about that. They are the ones making the lines longer through these draconian actions. And then they want to make it a crime to bring grandma some water while she is waiting in a line that they are making longer. Make no mistake, this is democracy in reverse. Rather than voters being able to pick the politicians, the politicians are trying to cherry-pick their voters. I say this cannot stand.

And so I rise, Mr. President, because that sacred and noble idea—one person, one vote—is being threatened right now. Politicians in my home State and all across America, in their craven lust for power, have launched a full-fledged assault on voting rights. They are focused on winning at any cost, even the cost of democracy itself. I submit that it is the job of each citizen to stand up for the voting rights of every citizen. And it is the job of this body to do all that it can to defend the viability of our democracy.

That is why I am a proud cosponsor of the For the People Act, which we introduced today. The For the People Act is a major step in the march toward our Democratic ideals, making it easier, not harder, for eligible Americans to vote by instituting commonsense, pro-democracy reforms, like establishing national automatic voter registration for every eligible citizen and allowing all Americans to register to vote online and on election day; requiring States to offer at least 2 weeks of early voting, including weekends, in Federal elections, keeping Souls to the Polls programs alive; prohibiting States from restricting a person's ability to vote absentee or by mail; and preventing States from purging the voting rolls based solely on unreliable evidence like someone's voting history, something we have seen in Georgia and other States in recent years. And it would end the dominance of Big Money in our politics and ensure our public servants are there serving the public.

Amidst these voter suppression laws and tactics, including partisan and racial gerrymandering, and in a system awash in dark money and the dominance of corporate interests and politicians who do their bidding, the voices of the American people have been increasingly drowned out and crowded out and squeezed out of their own democracy. We must pass For the People so that the people might have a voice. Your vote is your voice, and your voice is your human dignity. But not only that, we must pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

You know, voting rights used to be a bipartisan issue. The last time the voting rights bill was reauthorized was 2006. George W. Bush was President, and it passed this Chamber 98 to 0. But then, in its 2013 decision, the Supreme Court rejected the successful formula for supervision and preclearance contained in the 1965 Voting Rights Act. They asked Congress to fix it. That was nearly 8 years ago, and the American people are still waiting. Stripped of protections, voters in States with a long history of voter discrimination and voters in many other States have been thrown to the winds.

We Americans have noisy and spirited debates about many things, and we should. That is what it means to live in a free country. But access to the ballot ought to be nonpartisan. I submit that there should be 100 votes in this Chamber for policies that will make it easier for Americans to make their voices heard in our democracy. Surely, there ought to be at least 60 in this Chamber who believe, as I do, that the four most powerful words uttered in a democracy are ''the people have spoken''; therefore, we must ensure that all of the people can speak.

But if not, we must still pass voting rights. The right to vote is preservative of all other rights. It is not just another issue alongside other issues. It is foundational. It is the reason why any of us have the privilege of standing here in the first place. It is about the covenant we have with one another as an American people: ''e pluribus unum,'' out of many, one. It, above all else, must be protected.

So let's be clear. I am not here today to spiral into the procedural argument regarding whether the filibuster in general has merits or has outlived its usefulness. I am here to say that this issue is bigger than the filibuster. I stand before you saying that this issue—access to voting and preempting politicians' efforts to restrict voting—is so fundamental to our democracy that it is too important to be held hostage by a Senate rule, especially one historically used to restrict the expansion of voting rights. It is a contradiction to say we must protect minority rights in the Senate while refusing to protect minority rights in the society. Colleagues, no Senate rule should overrule the integrity of our democracy, and we must find a way to pass voting rights, whether we get rid of the filibuster or not.

So as I close—and nobody believes a preacher when he says ''as I close''—let me say that I, as a man of faith, believe that democracy is the political enactment of a spiritual idea, the sacred worth of all human beings, the notion that we all have within us a spark of the divine, and a right to participate in the shaping of our destiny. Reinhold Niebuhr was right:

> [Humanity's] capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but [humanity's] inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.

John Lewis understood that and was beaten on a bridge defending it. Amelia Boynton, like so many women not mentioned nearly enough, was gassed on that same bridge. A White woman named Viola Liuzzo was killed. Medgar Evers was murdered in his own driveway. Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman, two Jews and an African American, standing up for that sacred idea of democracy, also paid the ultimate price. And we in this body would be stopped and stymied by bipartisan politics? Short-term political gain? Senate procedure? I say let's get this done, no matter what.

I urge my colleagues to pass these two bills, strengthen and lengthen the course of our democracy, secure our credibility as the premier voice for freedom-loving people and democratic movements all over the world, and win the future for all of our children.

I yield the floor.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

AGENT ORANGE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, we can be proud of the bipartisan work the Senate has accomplished in recent years to expand veterans' benefits. Last Congress, we made significant progress with passage of legislation to enhance education, pensions, burial compensation, and landmark improvements to Department of Veterans Affairs care and services for women veterans, in addition to a groundbreaking initiative to prevent veteran suicides.

I am hopeful we can use this momentum to continue turning legislation into law to ensure we fill the promise our country made to the men and women who served in uniform, as well as their families. We know that too many veterans are being left behind because of current VA policies that prohibit them from accessing benefits and healthcare services they have earned.

Veterans like Bill Rhodes of Mena, AR, a marine who served in Thailand during the Vietnam war era, are pleading with Congress to help them get needed medical care and support. After developing illnesses linked to herbicide exposure, Mr. Rhodes turned to the VA for help. His claim was denied. He did his homework. He spent time looking for documentation to support his claim and realized this is a problem that needs a legislative fix because the Department's policies limit benefits for Vietnam war era for Thailand service.

I am proud to join with my colleague and chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Senator TESTER, to introduce legislation to help Mr. Rhodes and veterans like him who were exposed to Agent Orange and other herbicides while serving in Thailand during the Vietnam war.

The VA accepts that herbicides were used on fenced-in perimeters of military bases in Thailand, but its current policy is too restrictive. Among other things, it prohibits veterans who worked in security-related specialties. It is reasonable to believe that veterans on Thai bases were exposed to Agent Orange no matter what their jobs were or where their duty stations were.

In an article published in the Dayton Daily News, one veteran who served in Thailand said his barracks were along the perimeter, and at the time of the interview, he still hadn't received benefits for his VA claim.

The arbitrary limits on consideration of a veteran's claim to toxic exposure are simply wrong. These misguided technicalities and bureaucratic hurdles need to be addressed. Our bill would eliminate the unreasonable burden placed on veterans to prove toxic exposure.

No veteran should be denied benefits due to redtape. These Americans who served our country, and to this day are paying a high price as a result, have been carelessly hindered by the current limitations on the presumption of toxic exposure to Agent Orange, but they aren't forgotten. We have an obligation to ensure they get the benefits they are due, and I am committed to supporting their cause.

I appreciate the determination and tireless efforts of Mr. Rhodes. He said this legislation gives him some hope, but he won't be proud of his work until the bill is passed.

I encourage my colleagues to support our legislation. I look forward to working with members of the Senate VA Committee to eliminate the barriers that prevent veterans from getting the care and resources they have earned.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the Senate will soon vote on the nomination of California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to lead the Department of Health and Human Services. Moving this nomination forward required an additional procedural step and more floor debate than others, so I will make just a few quick points this afternoon.

First, in our lifetime, America has never faced a greater public health challenge than the pandemic we face today. The Department of Health and Human Services is our point Agency, the leading Agency to coordinate the effort to end the pandemic as soon as possible. Right now, for example, it is coordinating the distribution of vaccines. It is working to get PPE, the critical protective equipment, into the hands of nurses and doctors and all those providers who desperately need more of it. The Department supports rural hospitals to keep them afloat so that rural patients have access to care.

The Department's work includes the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, the National Guard, all 50 States and the District of Columbia, as well as private healthcare systems, doctors, and many individuals across the country.

The American people, we all know, are ready for this pandemic to end. They certainly understand that having a person to coordinate the critical efforts of the Department of Health and Human Services confirmed and on the job is part of that effort. There simply is no argument for delaying this confirmation any longer.

Attorney General Becerra has the right leadership experience and the right health policy experience to succeed in this critical job. He currently heads the Nation's second largest department of justice. He is in charge of a billion-dollar budget and more than 4,000 employees. He is the top law enforcement official in what would be the fifth largest economy in the world.

In terms of health policy, which is in the area I try to specialize in, I can tell Senators that Xavier Becerra has spent years and years on these issues at the Ways and Means Committee, the key committee in the other body with jurisdiction over healthcare. He has been through major policy debates, including the Affordable Care Act. As California's attorney general, he defended the act in court.

When the pandemic hit, he fought to protect the health and well-being of all Californians, particularly nurses and doctors and those workers who found themselves in harm's way.

Attorney General Becerra has the health policy savvy and the leadership savvy and the experience in both areas to run this Department, no question about it.

Attorney General Becerra made it clear to members of the Finance Committee that he will follow the law. Quaint idea. He said it again and again in response to a barrage of questions. He is going to be accessible to Senators. He is going to work to find common ground on key healthcare issues. I was glad he said it because that is heavy lifting. Most of the time, that is really all you can ask of nominees of the other party.

Healthcare is oftentimes a divisive subject. I think every Senator understands that. It is particularly true when it comes to women's healthcare. But it is clear to me that Attorney General Becerra wants to bring the two sides together. That is a great place to start after the last 4 years of knockdown, drag-out battles over healthcare issues that clearly took America in the wrong direction.

I am going to close with just one thought about why this position is so important. I don't know of any prospect more unifying among Americans than ending the pandemic and getting life back to normal as quickly as possible. Parents want their kids back in school. Grandparents want to hug their grandkids. Everybody wants to feel safe and get out in their communities.

Getting our country to that point is the essence of what this job is all about. Heading the Department of Health and Human Services focuses exactly on those things people want to have the country come together on. But we need to come together to beat the pandemic, and the Department needs its leader confirmed and on the job now.

I was pleased that there was bipartisan support for discharging Attorney General Becerra's nomination from the Finance Committee. I hope the Senate gives his nomination bipartisan support once again when it is time to vote on his confirmation.

I look forward to working with him in the months and years to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I oppose the confirmation of California Attorney General Becerra to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Our future HHS Secretary will be at the helm of rebuilding our country toward normalcy and preparing to address the weaknesses in our healthcare infrastructure, brought to light by the pandemic. It will be no small task, and its handling will have an impact on America for years to come. It will require a leader at HHS who has the trust of the public and the requisite healthcare experience. Unfortunately, those two factors are missing from the nomination of Attorney General Becerra.

In recovering from a once-in-a-century public health emergency, Americans need to have the confidence that our HHS Secretary understands the intricacies of healthcare policy and has an eye to the future as we improve upon our prepandemic vulnerabilities, protecting future generations from experiencing similar pandemic situations.

While Attorney General Becerra served on a healthcare-focused subcommittee as a U.S. Representative, he has no further experience in public health or medicine. He also lacks the executive experience that would be useful in running a complex executive branch Department like HHS, which is involved in the nationwide vaccine rollout and now the regulatory implementation of the recent $1.9 trillion package.

The American people need to trust that their HHS Secretary will work for them, regardless of disagreements over ideology. Like a President, Cabinet officials work for the entire country, and broad public trust is essential. As Mr. Becerra was serving in his current role in California as attorney general, the Trump administration was making significant regulatory changes to protect the sanctity of life. Attorney General Becerra then spent much of his time attempting to overturn or ignore those changes.

Most recently, Attorney General Becerra actively defended a California law requiring abortion coverage in insurance plans offered by churches. The Office of Civil Rights at HHS ruled on January 24, 2020, that the State's abortion mandate violated Federal law, but Attorney General Becerra refused to comply.

Ideological or moral disagreements should not be met with legal challenges. Americans need to know that

their government is working to find a common ground that will protect all strongly held personal and religious beliefs, including the belief in the sanctity of life.

Thoughtful healthcare policy matters to Kansans and Americans now more than ever. We need a leader at HHS who is eager to serve all of the country, even in the face of disagreements—one who has the necessary healthcare expertise to be successful in this position and will be an asset to our country in this time of rebuilding.

I oppose this confirmation and urge my colleagues to join me.

EQUALITY ACT

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, today the Senate Judiciary Committee is considering a grave threat to the right of conscience. The House recently passed the Equality Act, which would demolish religious liberty protections, ironically making Americans of certain beliefs decidedly unequal under the law. In other words, for something called religious protections, the Equality Act would diminish the capability to be considered equal under the law.

It is not an accident of careless drafting that permits this outcome. The language is both so expansive and so explicit that it must be intentional and it must be intentionally hostile to people who hold such beliefs.

The language expands the definition of public accommodations to include prohibiting discrimination by ''any establishment that provides a good, service, or program, including a . . . food bank, service or care center, [or] shelter,'' and any organization receiving Federal funding. Religiously affiliated entities seeking to put their beliefs into action outside their church, mosque, or synagogue must comply.

The authors know such an expansive definition infringes on the constitutional rights of religious liberty. That is because this legislation would explicitly—explicitly—deny recourse to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, or RFRA, a bill that was passed with overwhelmingly bipartisan majorities in both Chambers of Congress before being signed by President Bill Clinton in 1993.

This denial cuts off two legal paths for people of conscience. One, an individual or institution cannot sue the Federal Government to prevent enforcement of this act without statutory—explicit statutory—authority of RFRA. And, two, the individual institution that is sued for discrimination under this bill cannot rely on RFRA as a defense.

It is not an exaggeration to say that the five lines related to RFRA in this bill represent one of the most dramatic assaults against religious faith and conscience that I have seen in my time in Congress. The effects will be damaging to communities in Kansas and across the country.

If passed, people of faith must decide whether to adhere to their deeply held beliefs or to the law. This law effectively says it is better to have fewer doctors in rural Kansas, which desperately needs them, than it is to have doctors of moral conviction; that it is better to shutter social services administered by faith-based groups that fill gaps in our safety net than to allow them to remain true to their mission; or that it is better to force the closure of religious schools in urban areas, which so often provide a path out of poverty, than to allow them to remain open and teach principles of faith.

In response to the Obama contraception mandate a decade ago, I warned: ''If the government can compel an individual or group to violate one's conscience, then there is no limit to government power.'' That remains true now, nearly 10 years later, and remains true into the future.

I will oppose the use of such government power to infringe on matters of religious belief and conscience, and I stand in opposition to the Equality Act.

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.

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.

FILIBUSTER

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it appears that our friends across the aisle are experiencing an existential crisis when it comes to deciding how to manage their newfound powers in the majority. We are just 2½ months into this new Congress, and already we are hearing the majority leader and many on the other side of the aisle threatening to blow up the rules of the Senate. After decades as a Senator, President Biden even yesterday relented and threw his support behind the plan.

The filibuster has been called into question a number of times over the past few years. That is to be expected, but it is just that our Democratic friends used to be on the other side of the argument. They took one position when they were in the minority, where the filibuster protected their rights. And now when they are in the majority, many of them are looking to eliminate any minority rights and to fundamentally change the Senate.

In 2018, our Democratic colleagues were afraid the Republican Senate majority would blow up the filibuster. I am not really sure why they were concerned. After all, Senator MCCONNELL and Republican Senators have consistently defended the rights of the minority by use of the legislative filibuster, even when President Trump called for it to be eliminated.

But our Democratic friends keep piling on. Senator DURBIN, the Senator from Illinois, the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, was asked about President Trump's call to end the filibuster—that was when President Trump called to end the filibuster—and he said: ''That would be the end of the Senate as it was originally devised and created going back to the Founding Fathers.'' That would be on the right-hand side of this chart. Just to repeat, he said: ''That would be the end of the Senate as it was originally devised and created going back to the Founding Fathers.''

I agree with Senator DURBIN. I agreed then, and I agree now.

The Senate filibuster was designed to ensure that the two political parties would actually have to work together, which I think the American people believe is a good thing. And it should be hard to do the work of building consensus in a country as big and diverse as the United States.

But the filibuster was designed to make sure that the majority just couldn't jam things through and deny the rights of the minority to be heard. But when you get 60 Senators to agree on something, it becomes all but impossible for ultrapartisan proposals to become law. That is the nature of the consensus-building process, and that is a good thing for the country.

Imagine the instability and unpredictability that would occur if laws changed as quickly as Presidents and Senate majorities do. Just 4 years ago, Republicans controlled both Chambers of Congress and held the White House. Twelve years ago, our Democratic colleagues controlled all three. The filibuster was designed to encourage, again, consensus building on a bipartisan basis and to provide some stability between those transitory majorities and changing Presidents. And that is a good thing, like I said, in a country where the political party in control is constantly changing, and it ensures that a minority viewpoint cannot be steamrolled.

Our Senate Democratic friends have certainly benefited from the protections of the filibuster over the last 6 years. They filibustered countless bills on everything from pandemic relief to police reform.

But now it appears that our Democratic colleagues—at least their leadership—have flip-flopped. The political tides have shifted, and since the radical left wants to get rid of the filibuster, so do they.

In a floor speech earlier this week, this same Senator, Senator DURBIN, our friend from Illinois, said the filibuster is ''not the guarantor of democracy. It has become the death grip of democracy''—a pretty dramatic conversion from 2018 to 2021.

What has changed? Well, the majority has changed. Republicans controlled the majority when he thought the filibuster was a good thing. Now, when Democrats control the majority, he thinks it is a bad thing.

Apparently, the countless filibusters of our Democratic colleagues were not a mockery of democracy. They certainly wouldn't be guilty of that. But

now that the shoe is on the other foot, Democrats are ready to hit the big red button and go nuclear. And, I must say, once you go nuclear around here, you certainly don't go back.

But Senator DURBIN's views aren't the only ones that have changed on this matter. As I mentioned, former Senator and now President Joe Biden finally changed his views as well. For decades, he was a staunch defender of the institution. When he was asked about removing the filibuster, going nuclear, he said:

> This nuclear option is ultimately an example of the arrogance of power. It is a fundamental power-grab by the majority party.

Well, that is certainly not mincing your words. And this isn't some long ago abandoned view of his. In January of this year, President Biden was asked if he could move his agenda with the filibuster rules intact, and he answered yes and explained the opportunities to work together on shared priorities, as he did throughout his career as a U.S. Senator.

He went on to add:

> I think we can reach consensus on that and get it passed without changing the filibuster rule.

But now the pressure has been put on both President Biden and the Democratic leadership in the Senate to endorse a rules change, not by the ordinary course of rule changes but by the nuclear option. We know that there are unpredictable consequences of changing the rules in a place where your power, where your majority, is never guaranteed. Chipping away at the rights of the minority may help you today, but you will live to regret it when the shoe is on the other foot.

But it won't take a shift in the majority for our Democratic colleagues to see the disastrous consequences of going nuclear on the filibuster rule because, if anybody needed a reminder, we have a 50–50 Senate: 50 Democrats and 50 Republicans.

Yesterday, Senator MCCONNELL, the Republican leader, somebody who has been around this institution a long time and understands it better than almost anybody I know, reminded our colleagues that ''[t]his is an institution that requires unanimous consent to turn the lights on before noon.''

Unanimous consent is literally the grease that helps the machine run. In order to accomplish even the most mundane tasks in the Senate, you need an agreement. Most of the time it is easy because it is not controversial; it is not partisan; it is the right, practical thing to do. But you need compromise, and you need a quorum.

This rules change being floated wouldn't clear a path for productivity in the Senate. It is an invitation to futility. If our Democratic colleagues take the unprecedented step of blowing up the filibuster, they can expect to be met with an unprecedented response.

Republicans will not sit idly by while Democrats take an axe to the rules in order to advance a partisan agenda. If Democrats go down this road, they will have no one to blame but themselves for the consequences of a horrible miscalculation.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. President, on another matter, as we know, it has been more than a year since the term ''COVID–19'' became a part of our daily vocabulary. Over this last year, families have lost loved ones, millions of workers have lost their jobs, Main Street businesses have shuttered, and our healthcare workers have endured unimaginable stress and heartbreak.

One year ago, the majority of Americans were hunkered down at home in order to stop the spread of this deadly virus, and today, while we continue to follow the commonsense public health guidelines to stop the spread of the virus, we are finally experiencing some hope. With three successful vaccines now being administered throughout the country, the light at the end of the tunnel gets bigger and brighter every day. I know we are all grateful for that.

More than 27 percent of Americans 18 and up have received at least one dose of the vaccine. That includes nearly two-thirds of people over the age of 65, one of the most vulnerable cohorts. We have every reason to be optimistic that brighter days are ahead, but we are not out of the dark yet.

In the coming months, we need sound leadership from public health officials who have the experience and the expertise to guide us through these final, critical months. Unfortunately, President Biden has nominated someone who is unprepared to lead that charge.

The President has chosen Xavier Becerra to be his Secretary of Health and Human Services. As we know, the Secretary of Health and Human Services is one of the top generals in the war against COVID–19. The Department coordinates the healthcare providers, State and local officials, researchers, and the American public to respond to a crisis like this. For everything from COVID–19 testing to treatment and therapeutics, to vaccinations, HHS is actually in charge.

The Department disburses funding. It determines how many vaccines go to each State. It leads efforts to boost public confidence in the vaccine and so much more, but that is not even including the long list of nonpandemic responsibilities for the Department, including everything from overseeing Medicare and Medicaid to regulating prescription drugs.

So what life experience does Mr. Becerra have that makes him qualified to lead these efforts? Well, he is not a doctor. He is not a public health expert. He has never even worked in a role that is remotely related to healthcare. In fact, his only semirelevant experience is the range of lawsuits he has filed as attorney general of his home State of California.

Mr. Becerra led a group of attorneys general in opposing the Texas lawsuit Texas v. Azar. The case attempted to reinstate the individual mandate penalty which was removed by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. He also led a case attempting to overturn protections for religious groups, such as the Little Sisters of the Poor, that don't offer coverage for contraceptives in their group health insurance plans. He sued them. Well—no surprise—the Supreme Court ultimately ruled 7 to 2 in favor of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

And, as we know, Mr. Becerra's radical policy objectives date long before his time as attorney general. As a Member of the House, he took extreme views on abortion. He opposed legislation that would ensure that babies who were born after a botched abortion would receive medical treatment, just like any other patient.

He opposed a bill to prevent taxpayer dollars from being used for abortions, the Hyde amendment, which has been bipartisan consensus for at least since the late seventies. He even opposed legislation to make it a crime to harm or kill an unborn child during the commission of a violent crime. In 38 States, including his State of California, they already have similar protections, but he opposed legislation to do it.

Unlike the majority of President Biden's nominees who received bipartisan support by both the committees of jurisdiction and the full Senate, there is no bipartisan chorus singing the praises of Mr. Becerra. Put simply, he is a partisan warrior who lacks the experience to lead HHS during normal times, let alone during a pandemic.

We are at the 10-yard line in the pandemic. Now is not the time to give the punter a chance to try out his quarterback just because he happens to be friends with the coach.

I would oppose the nomination of Mr. Becerra and encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do so as well. The American people deserve an experienced Health and Human Services Secretary, and this nominee does not fit the bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

SUNSHINE WEEK

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, it has been a year now since the outbreak of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China. It put the world into an unprecedented global lockdown, and we are still in the dark about how the pandemic even began.

Folks, this isn't entirely an accident. The virus emerged in one of the world's most closed societies, ruled by a ruthless authoritarian regime with no tolerance for truth or transparency. And, even today, after 2½ million people around the world have died, the Communist Party of China refuses to fully cooperate with efforts to learn how COVID–19 made the cross-species jump from bats to humans. Finding the source isn't about assigning blame; it is about understanding the cause and preventing a similar occurrence from happening again.

Here is what we do know: COVID appeared in the vicinity of the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a laboratory where studies were being conducted on bat coronaviruses. After the outbreak began, Chinese officials ordered the destruction of coronavirus samples. In the months just prior to the first case of the new pathogen being publicly identified, researchers at this state-run lab reportedly became sick with COVID-like symptoms.

Years ago, U.S. officials who visited the institute sent warnings back to the State Department that studies were being conducted on dangerous coronaviruses from bats that could be transmitted to humans in a lab which had ''serious'' safety problems.

Some of that research was even being subsidized by U.S. taxpayer dollars, including a study published less than 2 years before the pandemic that found the first evidence that humans could be infected with coronaviruses from bats. You heard that correctly, folks. Your tax dollars were paying for dangerous studies on coronaviruses in a lab in China that our own government officials had warned was unsafe.

This all raises many questions, the first being, How much were we actually paying for this endeavor? And that should be relatively easy for anyone to discover since a law renewed by Congress every single year requires all projects supported by the Department of Health and Human Services to include a pricetag disclosing the cost paid by taxpayers. But noticeably absent on the study from the Wuhan Institute: the cost.

A review of numerous other projects supported by HHS found that cost information was missing from all of them—all of them. Covering up information that the public has a right to know about might be how things work in Communist China, but it isn't how it should work here in America.

This isn't China, folks. Our laws aren't optional, especially for those who are supposed to be enforcing them.

Maybe we can't force China to be forthcoming, but we should be able to expect our own government to be open and transparent. That is why I am asking the HHS Office of Inspector General to launch an investigation to compel the Department to comply with the law.

I am also introducing legislation to require every project funded with your taxpayer dollars to disclose the cost paid by you. This is just one of the bright ideas to shine some light on how your money is being spent that I will be unveiling this week to commemorate Sunshine Week, the annual celebration of open government.

A transparent government is one of the most fundamental principles that make our government—of the people, by the people, for the people—work. Decisions are made every day in Washington that impact families and communities in Iowa and across the country.

We all benefit when we bring this information to light, especially when it involves how our tax dollars are being spent. That is why I am also working to create an alert system to notify the public whenever a project goes $1 billion or more over budget or falls 5 years behind schedule.

Some good news: My bipartisan bill was just reported out of committee this morning, so boondoggles, you better beware.

Another bill I will be supporting will require hospitals and insurers to reveal rates to patients before they receive their medical care. This commonsense effort would allow patients to know the costs associated with their healthcare in advance so that they can make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

Finally, I am calling for more transparency from the Department of Education when it comes to COVID spending. Taxpayers should be able to see clearly how well States and school districts are doing at spending tax dollars provided to help schools safely reopen.

Knowledge is the power that allows every citizen to hold those entrusted to make our decisions accountable. After all, the only reason to keep taxpayers in the dark about any of these decisions is because they can't withstand the scrutiny that results when all of the facts come to light.

With the Sun now setting an hour later as a result of daylight saving time, we are all reminded just how much a difference can be made with a little extra sunlight. After all, sunshine is the best disinfectant because to stop waste, we first need to be able to spot it.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The Senator from Indiana.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. BRAUN. Madam President, I have come to the floor several times in the little over 2 years I have been here, and a common theme—and I think we all know it as Senators—is that our healthcare system is broken. It is driven by misaligned industry incentives that promote opaque, behind-the-scenes pricing maneuvers at the expense of patients and healthcare consumers.

Increased transparency is the key to fixing our broken healthcare system. It will allow Americans to have skin in the game and deal directly with their healthcare providers to make informed decisions. They cannot do that very well currently.

Pulling the curtain back on a healthcare system to restore market forces, which aren't really there now, to increase innovation and competition, particularly in regard to price, quality, and service—you do that with anything else. A consumer is engaged, they are informed, and you have many competitors competing for their business.

In order for Americans to regain their sovereignty in a healthcare system, you need the ability to be able to navigate accordingly. Congress must act to provide Americans with these tools before we try to throw more government at a broken healthcare system.

Government pays for a portion of healthcare; more is paid through the private sector. If we reform it, it makes it less expensive for both payers. To give you an example, sometimes what you hear here sounds like it is theoretical, hypothetical. I took on the cause roughly 12, 13 years ago in my Main Street enterprise that was just starting to grow, doing the things it was supposed to do, and that is transportation distribution. Then all of a sudden, healthcare becomes a subset of your business, and about the only solution you would get each year is, well, you are lucky it is not going up more than 5 or 10 percent.

I heard that too many years in a row. I was sick and tired of that being what I would have to live with as a CEO who had a healthy, successful business other than the healthcare component. What did I do? Healthcare plans are basically made up of three or four features.

You have your deductible. Ours had risen more than I was willing to take it up any higher. The only way you could buy premiums down would be to do that or change underwriters every 2 or 3 years. That gets to be a hassle as you become a larger company, and the profits were so great then for people who did it, you could end up bringing your cost down. Well, then you were right back in the old groove of, you are lucky it is only going up 5 to 10 percent the next year on renewal.

You also have coinsurance. Most people don't worry about that until they get significantly ill or have a bad accident. That is the percentage you have to pay once you exceed your deductible.

When you have those variables, you have one other item that almost everyone loves in their plan, and that is a low copayment. Those copayments are paid for in the high premiums, but it is because they constitute nearly 25 percent of most healthcare plans, and that is to keep skin out of the game for the people who use the system.

Well, I was going to do something different and decided to limit that expense when you really get sick or have a bad accident, covered coinsurance through the company, and asked my employees to engage from dollar one in shopping around and see if that would work.

Lo and behold, it has now been 13 years, and we have been able to keep a good plan in place, lower family healthcare premium contributions, and have not had a premium increase. What is it based upon? It is finding the meager transparency that was out there 12, 13 years ago and enhancing it over time. To give an example, if you pick up the phone, you get on the web, you will find anywhere from 30, 50, 60, 70

percent savings. Procedures like MRIs, CAT scans, colonoscopies can run anywhere from 700 to 3,000 bucks. Your insurance companies seem to always shove you to the most expensive one. They give you these huge discounts, take their margin out of it, and it still costs you a bundle.

When the consumer gets engaged, you will see prices start to come down. LASIK surgery is the best example, where you have no insurance involved. Ten, fifteen years ago, that could be up to $2,000 an eye. Now, it is advertised heavily, providers go after their customers, and you can probably get it done for as little as $250 to $500 an eye, with better quality. That sounds like a lot of other areas of our economy that actually work.

Last Congress, I put healthcare transparency at the forefront of my agenda and have definitely been the most outspoken Senator that we have a broken system; put almost all the blame on the industry itself because it does not give us transparency. It does not want to compete. The healthcare customer is somewhat to blame because they don't want to pay for anything. And I don't think the answer is bringing more government into it until you reform the system.

We need to shine light on the dark corners and the misaligned incentives embedded in the current system. Among the bills I will reintroduce this Congress is the Healthcare PRICE Transparency Act. Every Senator should want to be on that bill to hold the industry accountable. This will empower patients through transparency. It will drive competition among hospitals and insurers by requiring them to publicly disclose their prices so patients can compare between providers and insurers.

Last Congress, a number of my colleagues joined in my effort to bring more transparency and affordability to healthcare consumers. I am excited to reintroduce the Healthcare PRICE Transparency Act soon and hope all of my colleagues will join in so that we can collectively lower healthcare costs before we try to get more government involved.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

SUNSHINE WEEK

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, I am proud to join my colleagues in celebration of Sunshine Week and promote the importance of government openness and transparency. Transparency isn't something you see too much up here in Washington. Being accountable to the American people should be a basic function of government.

In Florida, we have sunshine laws to promote openness and build our citizens' trust in government. When I came to Washington, I made it my mission to bring the success and transparency we had in Florida to the Federal Government and make this dysfunctional place work for the American people.

Unfortunately, my Democratic colleagues have blocked nearly every single one of my efforts for transparency and requests for information to help Congress make the best decisions for American families.

Last month, I wrote to President Biden's Acting Director for the Office of Management and Budget requesting any documents related to enacted but currently unspent COVID–19 stimulus funding. The response? None. Total silence.

This month, as we considered the Democrats' wasteful and partisan $1.9 trillion COVID spending package, I introduced a resolution calling on President Biden to inform the Senate and the American people of how much unspent funds are left over from the previous COVID spending bills, but Democrats blocked it.

When my colleague Senator JOHNSON called for their massive, 600-page bill to be read on the floor so the American people could know exactly what was in the bill, Democrats complained and called it a waste of time.

Let me be clear. Being transparent, open, and accountable to the American people is actually never a waste of time; it is our job. That is why I have been working on several measures to bring sunshine transparency to Washington, including my bill to make sure Members of Congress work for the American people and actually read bills before casting their votes and my STOP COVID–19 Act to set vaccine distribution reporting and transparency standards for States and create a program for cities and counties to increase funding, testing, contact tracing, and transparency efforts in order to reduce the spread of COVID.

I will never stop fighting to bring sunshine to Washington and working to make sure our government and the Biden administration are transparent, open, and accountable to the American people who elected us to serve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, I want to start by thanking Senator ERNST for once again setting up the Government Sunshine Week event and for her commitment, as was just discussed by my colleague from Florida, to ensuring taxpayers know where their money is going. This includes the $150 billion that the U.S. Government distributes every year in taxpayer funds for research grants. More transparency will help ensure that research isn't stolen by China and other countries.

In 2019, as the then-chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, or PSI, I led a bipartisan investigation with then-ranking-member Senator TOM CARPER into China's theft of U.S. intellectual property and U.S. research at our research institutions and college campuses.

As many of you know, China has made no secret of its goal to surpass the United States as the world leader in scientific research. This has become even clearer, by the way, during the COVID–19 pandemic, as China has attempted to get information in the United States to help produce their own vaccines to rival ours. But what most don't know is that China has been using our taxpayer-funded research enterprise here in the United States to accomplish this long-term goal. China uses talent recruitment programs—most notably its Thousand Talents Plan—to recruit researchers at American universities and research institutions using taxpayer-funded grants to do the same research at shadow labs in China or transfer taxpayer-funded research back to China—research that has been used over the past two decades to strengthen China's military and its own economic rise.

Along the way, they have been aided by a lack of transparency in our Federal grant-making process that has allowed researchers to receive taxpayer funding without disclosing their ties to foreign governments. What is worse, Federal law enforcement officials at the FBI knew about this for years and admitted at our PSI hearing last Congress: ''We wish we had taken more rapid and comprehensive action in the past.'' I wish they had.

I am pleased the Trump administration chose to follow through on their promise to do better in this regard. Since our report, prosecutors have charged at least 13 researchers here in the United States for failing to disclose their ties to the Chinese Government and Chinese Communist Party—researchers at prestigious institutions like Harvard and the Ohio State University. Many of our colleges and universities around the country have been part of this.

The Biden administration must stand by the promises made on the campaign trail to keep the pressure on China, and that includes on this issue. We can also help here in Congress by shining a light on the grant-making process and passing laws to help us keep track and protect these important investments in our research.

In the coming weeks, I will be reintroducing bipartisan legislation called the Safeguarding American Innovation Act, which uses the key findings from our bipartisan PSI investigation and report to protect the research enterprise—in part, through more transparency.

First, our bill creates a cross-governmental council at the Office of Management and Budget to coordinate and streamline unauthorized access and grant-making processes between Federal Agencies so that there is greater transparency in where the money is going and how it is being used.

Second, the Safeguarding American Innovation Act makes it illegal to lie on a grant application about ties to

foreign governments like China. Transparency here will make it clear that researchers are liable for attempting to mislead the government when trying to receive taxpayer funds.

Third, our legislation closes loopholes exploited by China and other foreign actors and empowers the State Department to deny visas to foreign researchers aiming to steal U.S. intellectual property and research.

Fourth, the Safeguarding American Innovation Act requires research institutions and universities to safeguard against unauthorized access to sensitive technology and to be transparent with the State Department about what technologies a foreign researcher will have access to on campus.

Finally, the act requires transparency from our colleges and universities as to what money they are getting from foreign sources. They will have to report any foreign gift of $50,000 or more, and it empowers the Department of Education to fine universities that repeatedly fail to disclose these gifts. Current law requires reporting, but at $250,000. We found that nearly 70 percent of U.S. universities consistently failed to do even that. Lowering the threshold increases transparency, and adding the penalty ensures the schools will report.

The American Council on Education has supported our PSI report's recommendation that research institutions should establish a ''know your collaborator'' culture.

Greater transparency in our Federal grant-making process, great transparency from our research institutions and universities—these are the steps we need to take to ensure that there is proper accountability in place for the $150 billion that taxpayers entrust with the government for federally funded research every year, while still keeping our fundamental research open and collaborative.

The Safeguarding American Innovation Act will shine a light on the Federal grant-making processes and allow us to maintain our world-class lead in innovations, while protecting our investments from foreign theft.

Again, I want to thank my colleague Senator ERNST, in particular, for this event today to talk about transparency, and I urge my colleagues to support this important legislation that will provide long overdue transparency in our federally funded research enterprise.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, about 4 weeks ago, it got cold in Oklahoma—really cold. My house was at negative 14 degrees. Now, Senator STEVE DAINES from Montana is used to that, but in Oklahoma we are not used to negative 14 degrees. It was overcast, snowy, cold. Then, the sun broke through, and we had a day when it got up to 30 degrees. It was like everyone was going to the park. It felt so nice because the sun was out, even though it was cold.

Sunshine has a great way of making everyone lift and look around and say: Where has that been?

I think that happens in the Federal Government as well.

I thank Senator JONI ERNST for hosting what she is calling Sunshine Week to be able to say: What are we doing to put a little light into the Federal process to be able to make sure people can see into some of these programs? Because all the time I hear from people, and when something comes on the news, they will say: Where did that come from?

I will say: That was poked in some bill that probably no one read.

I will give you an example of it. Two weeks ago, when the ''COVID'' bill passed with almost $2 trillion in spending, I already had folks come back to me saying: I am grateful for that $70 million for the Small Business Administration to increase some of the loans by $70 million.

I said: Great. Do you know how much the administrative cost was on that $70 million program?

The answer is $390 million in administrative costs, $70 million in loans. That is in the bill.

Everyone looks at me and says: Oh, I didn't know that.

In lots of States around America right now, their legislatures are meeting, including mine in Oklahoma. They are suddenly finding out that that bill that was for ''COVID-related'' mandated that no State in America could reduce taxes on anyone. Lots of States are saying: Wait a minute; we were planning on reducing taxes on working families in certain targeted areas.

They are finding out that you can't do that, and they will say things like: I didn't know that was in the bill because there wasn't any sunshine on that bill.

I worked for years to pass a bill called the Taxpayers Right-To-Know Act. It is a commonsense bill. It asks a simple question: What programs do we do in the Federal Government? This body has heard about me talk about it year after year after year. Contrary to popular belief, it is not easy to actually move a bill in this place. Some things that are very commonsense take forever.

This was my simple bill. In the Federal Government, every Agency has to list every program that they do, how many employees they hire to do that program, what is the cost of the program, and is the program evaluated? If it is, just put the evaluation numbers with the program.

Why would I say that? Because I talk to Agency heads that start a new program and they get 2 years down the road from starting a new program and they find out a different Agency has already done that for 5 years. Then we get together and find out a third Agency started that 10 years ago. None of them knew about the other program.

Before you think that doesn't happen, oh, yes, it does. It happens all the time. Not only that, but I want to ask a simple question to say: How many options do we have for whatever it may be? How many programs do we have for STEM education, for instance? How many different incentives have we put out there, and how many Agencies are helping to provide greater STEM education? The Agencies can't tell me. They could eventually tell me what is in their Agency, but they don't know what other Agencies are doing.

And when I go to the GAO, the Government Accountability Office, and ask them, their answer is: I will get you an answer back in about 18 months—months—18 months before they can tell me how many STEM programs we have in the Federal Government. I should be able to do an internet search and get that in 18 seconds, not 18 months.

The Taxpayers Right-To-Know bill requires the Office of Management and Budget to actually work with every Agency to get a master list of every program across the Federal Government—how many employees they have, if it is evaluated, and what it does.

It is pretty simple. It is basic transparency, but it allows any American and all Members of Congress to be able to see what we do and if we have duplication in government.

Again, you may think that is simple and straightforward. It is, but it took years to actually pass. We finally got that passed and signed into law last December.

I met with Gene Dodaro, who heads up GAO, and asked him about it because he has also been an advocate of that for years. He said: We need an ''unequivocal commitment from the Office of Management and Budget to implement it properly'' because we have to actually get this done.

Sunshine helps. We can see how money is spent. We can see how duplication actually functions. We can't reform what we can't see. The American people perpetually get frustrated with what they didn't know was in a bill and find out later, and they don't like it.

In the days ahead, I will release my annual ''Federal Fumbles'' book, as we do every year. In that ''Federal Fumbles'' book, this year, we are going to outline where our debt comes from because I run into so many people who say: We have debt. Who is our debt? Is it all China?

I will say: Well, actually, $1.6 trillion of it is from China, and we are paying them interest every single year on that debt. But it is in a lot of other places.

A lot of people misunderstand what government debt really is. This needs some sunshine because if we are going to solve this, the American people have to be able to see it and so do we.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I rise to share my objections to the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

With $1.3 trillion of spending in Health and Human Services, that Department has the largest budget of the entire executive branch. In fact, if we were to compare the budget—the budget of HHS to other nation's GDPs—HHS, in fact, would rank among the top 10 in the world. The size of this Department is significant, and the responsibility is even greater.

Whoever oversees this Department has a big impact on our country, our economy, and the lives of all Americans, including those of the unborn. This is exactly why I am deeply concerned with President Biden's pick of Attorney General Xavier Becerra to lead HHS. Mr. Becerra has spent his career propagating far-left ideology and supporting divisive policies that don't resonate with the majority of Americans.

The Secretary of HHS has massive authority to steer the future of healthcare in our country, and someone who has made a career out of defending the abortion industry and promoting other liberal policies, like free healthcare for illegal immigrants, should not be at the helm of this Department.

I am concerned that Attorney General Becerra will use the power of this Agency to overstep and impose his radical liberal agenda on millions of Americans. This administration decidedly, intentionally, chose a nominee who has repeatedly attacked the religious freedoms of so many Americans, a nominee who has aggressively pushed a very pro-abortion agenda, a nominee who supports a complete takeover by the government of our healthcare, a nominee who advocates for illegal immigrants to receive taxpayer-funded healthcare.

How do these qualities make Attorney General Becerra the right person to head Health and Human Services? It just doesn't make sense to so many in our country. It is just another sign that this, unfortunately, is a far-left administration that is outside the mainstream.

Especially now, during a pandemic, it is critical that all Americans can trust whoever holds this position. It is critical that the leader of this massive Department will operate as a good steward of Federal health programs and not use his post to impose a government takeover of healthcare and to eradicate job-based coverage for millions of Americans.

Xavier Becerra is, unfortunately, not that person. He has built his career defending some of the very most extreme stances in our society, and we can expect that he will only take things further at HHS.

When it comes to abortion, Attorney General Becerra doesn't believe there should be any restrictions—not one. In fact, I had the chance to ask Mr. Becerra some questions a couple of weeks ago at a hearing. I asked if he would support a ban on the lethal discrimination of babies diagnosed with Down syndrome, or, perhaps, what about banning sex-selective abortions, or, at least, a ban on partial birth abortions. His refusal to answer spoke volumes. His inability to name even one restriction that he might think about putting on abortion is chilling.

Mr. Becerra's views on abortion even go a step further. He has repeatedly bullied and harassed Americans who respect the sanctity of life, like the Little Sisters of the Poor. This order of nuns has dedicated their lives to serving the less fortunate, and under their Catholic faith, they do not believe in providing abortions or contraceptives.

Attorney General Becerra litigated against these nuns in court and attempted to revoke an exemption that protects religious groups from providing contraceptives, and that goes against their religious beliefs. He has literally sued to impose crippling fines on Catholic nuns for remaining true to their religious believes—crippling fines on nuns—a horrendous attack on Americans' constitutional right to religious freedom.

He has stated that crossing the border illegally should be decriminalized. Let me say that again. He has stated that crossing the border illegally should be decriminalized. No wonder we are seeing a crisis on our southern border. He has repeatedly pushed for illegal immigrants to receive health benefits on the taxpayers' dime.

As we are seeing Biden's border crisis play out, it is even more alarming that one of his nominees would seek to incentivize illegal border crossings even more. I guess you could say this is all part of Biden's ''America Last'' agenda, but as Secretary of Health and Human Services, Xavier Becerra would have the massive ability to impose a pro-abortion, anti-religious freedom, socialist healthcare agenda. His nomination highlights just how extreme—sadly, how extreme—the Biden administration really is. These views fail to represent the majority of Americans and have no place at the head of the largest Department of our executive branch.

I urge my colleagues to consider the impact that Mr. Becerra would have as the head of Health and Human Services and to vote against his confirmation. Rather, we must stand up for life, for religious freedom, an ''America First'' agenda and against Mr. Becerra's nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, the stated mission of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is ''to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans.'' It is a laudable goal. The HHS Secretary is, thus, charged with overseeing all government healthcare and social services and protecting the health and the rights of the American people, a worthy goal, important job. Unfortunately, the history of the nominee before us, Mr. Xavier Becerra, poses grave concerns to our ability to carry out this goal and to our ability to oversee an Agency with such vast, far-reaching responsibilities.

First, Mr. Becerra has repeatedly been on the record for wanting to eliminate private health insurance for millions of Americans even at a time when families need affordable, effective, and flexible healthcare and when healthcare workers need jobs perhaps now more than ever. What is more concerning, however, is that, while in public office, Mr. Becerra has repeatedly, deliberately undermined Americans' constitutional rights and waged political warfare on those who happen to disagree with his views.

Take, for example, his views on abortion. Instead of supporting laws that protect and sustain the life and health of American women and unborn children, Mr. Becerra has supported laws that violently hurt them in his endorsing legal abortion up until and even during the moment of birth.

As Attorney General of the State of California, he brought 15 felony charges against a reporter for exposing Planned Parenthood's role in trafficking the body parts of aborted babies—a prosecution that even the Los Angeles Times described as ''disturbing overreach.''

He defended a California law that required pro-life pregnancy centers to advertise for State-funded abortion clinics, a law that so egregiously violated free speech that the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional, which, of course, it was and is.

Not only that, but he has consistently and flagrantly taken hostile actions against the free exercise of religion. Perhaps the worst example of this can be found in his legal persecution of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Now, this is a religious order of Catholic nuns that cares for the elderly poor. Becerra waged a lengthy, difficult battle to force the sisters—again, this is an order of nuns—to pay for abortion drugs and contraception in their health insurance plan even though doing so violates their beliefs and even though they are nuns.

Even after the Supreme Court ruled for the Little Sisters of the Poor in 2016 under a separate case and after the Trump administration granted them full conscience protections in 2017, Mr. Becerra still sued the Trump administration in an attempt to pierce those protections. Again, he wasn't comfortable with letting those protections stand in place with respect to the Little Sisters of the Poor. No. He was determined, even still, to make sure that they couldn't live according to their own religious beliefs and their teachings.

During the pandemic, Becerra was the legal architect of some of the country's most strident, sweeping, and brazenly unconstitutional restrictions on church and on worship services, some of which were struck down by the Supreme Court last month, and he even

tried to prevent COVID relief funds from going to religious and other private schools.

Our Founders established the principle of religious liberty—the natural right of all human beings to freely hold and live out their religious beliefs—because they understood that man is not free unless his conscience is free. They thought that this principle was so important, so fundamental, that it was the first freedom articulated in the very First Amendment to the Constitution. In doing so, they sought to defend and preserve the space of our deepest convictions, a space upon which a State cannot and must never encroach.

In practice, that has meant that the government's job is not to tell people what to believe or how to discharge their religious duties but to protect the space for all people of all faiths—and of no faith at all for that matter—to seek truth and to order their lives accordingly.

The American people deserve a leader at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services who will uphold and strengthen this monumental tradition. They deserve a leader who will protect their fundamental rights, not trample them. Unfortunately, tragically, the record of this nominee demonstrates serious threats to the rights and the health and the well-being of the American people. They deserve better. In good conscience, I cannot support the nomination of Mr. Becerra.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, it appears that President Biden arrived at the White House prepared and willing to grant himself and his administration a mandate that American voters didn't agree to give him.

His party lost ground in the House, split the Senate, and maintained their trailing minority of governorships, but they seem to ignore that. In his first 50 days, he signed 34 Executive orders—more than anyone in history. He dismantled existing immigration controls, threatened protections for small businesses against the radical climate agenda, and destroyed thousands of jobs and the potential for greater energy security promised by the Keystone XL Pipeline project.

Meanwhile, my Democratic colleagues got busy laying the groundwork to transform not only the Senate into a majoritarian institution but also to radically transform the country. They used budget reconciliation to ram through a $1.9 trillion bailout bill without a single Republican vote—the largest spending bill in our Nation's history—and now they are reversing their own positions on the filibuster to avoid debate on radical immigration reform, the Equality Act, and an already infamous bill that would federalize elections. They just don't want to talk about these things—just do it.

The more people learn about what the Biden White House is up to the more questions they have for those of us who represent them.

Some of my Democratic friends in Tennessee say to me: I may have voted for Joe Biden, but I did not vote for this.

They do not want to radically change the country. They do not want to be tied to legislation that has a nice-sounding name but that does the exact opposite of what the Biden administration would have you believe that it would accomplish.

They have noticed that the President's Cabinet picks have come to their confirmation hearings ready and willing to move the goalposts away from the Constitution and the rule of law in order to accommodate their radical agenda.

Last week, this body voted to discharge from committee Xavier Becerra's nomination to the Health and Human Services Secretary position. I voted no, and I will vote no on his confirmation as well, not only because he is unqualified and has no experience in healthcare—Middle Tennessee has more than 100,000 individuals who are employed in the healthcare industry, and all, all are more qualified in healthcare than Xavier Becerra—and not only because his radical views shock just about everyone who speaks to me about him. Oh, yes, it was a topic of conversation at church on Sunday but also because, time and again, he has abused his power and weaponized the full force of the government against people whose deeply held, personal, political, and religious views don't align with his own: submit, conform, or else.

It is in the nature of our job as legislators to recognize that, yes, elections do have consequences and that, yes, the President has a right to assemble his own Cabinet, but we cannot be expected to green-light a nominee who has so little patience for diversity—diversity of thought, diversity of opinions—that his first and only instinct is to destroy the diversity: Barrel in. Burn it to the ground. Build it back in their own image. That is not what the American people want President Biden and his administration to do, but that is what they are getting with this nominee.

I strongly oppose Xavier Becerra's nomination, as I have from the start, and I would urge my colleagues to consider what you will be approving if you vote in favor of this confirmation: radically anti-life, radically anti-religion, radically anti-border security, radically anti-free speech, radically unqualified to lead.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, I rise to oppose the nomination of Xavier Becerra for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

There are, unfortunately, numerous nominees in the Biden administration who are either extreme or unqualified for the positions for which they have been nominated, but of all of those nominees, I believe Mr. Becerra is the single worst Cabinet nominee put forward by Joe Biden to serve in the Cabinet.

President Biden has told this country repeatedly that his top priority is defeating the COVID–19 pandemic. The Department of Health and Human Services is on the frontline in fighting COVID–19. Mr. Becerra, by any measure, is woefully unqualified to lead that Department.

Mr. Becerra is not a doctor. Mr. Becerra is not a scientist. Mr. Becerra has no healthcare experience whatsoever. He has no medical experience whatsoever. He has no experience in virology. He has no experience with pharmaceuticals. He has no experience running a State or local healthcare agency. He has no experience in logistics. The Department of HHS is in the process of distributing and administering hundreds of millions of vaccines. Mr. Becerra has never so much as distributed french fries at a McDonald's.

Mr. Becerra's only qualification and, indeed, the qualification that earned him this nomination is he is a radical, leftwing trial attorney.

If a Republican President had nominated as the head of the Health and Human Services Agency someone with zero healthcare experience, zero medical experience, zero pharmaceutical experience in the midst of a global pandemic, that Republican President would have been laughed out of the room.

If a Republican President had done that, all of the Democrats would have been lined up here thundering: This is a President that doesn't care about science. We would have heard Democrats telling us: This is a President for whom defeating COVID–19 is not a priority, is not serious.

''This is a President,'' our Democratic colleagues would have told us, ''who puts partisan priorities above defeating the public health menace of COVID–19. This is a President who is more concerned about appeasing his radical base than he is about protecting the public health and safety of Americans.''

Had a Republican President nominated a nominee as unqualified as Mr. Becerra, I feel confident the Democrats would not have been alone. We would see multiple Republican Senators standing up, saying: No. We should actually have an HHS Secretary who knows something about science. We should have an HHS Secretary who knows something about medicine, something about pharmaceuticals.

I would note, by the way, President Trump nominated two HHS Secretaries. The first, Dr. Tom Price, was a medical doctor; the second, Alex Azar, was president of a major pharmaceutical company in the United States. Both had years and even decades of healthcare experience.

As best I can tell, Xavier Becerra's only experience with healthcare is

suing the Little Sisters of the Poor. Frankly, it should be a joke.

If a Republican President did this, a Republican Senate would discover the backbone to stand up and oppose it. And what I would say is sad is not a single Democrat is willing to stand up to Joe Biden and say: No. Try again. It is a pandemic. Over a half million Americans have died. How about putting someone at HHS that knows something about healthcare?

I will tell you right now, every Senator that supports this confirmation, when they go home, should be prepared to answer to their constituents—should be prepared to answer when their constituents say: Why did you vote to confirm a guy at HHS who doesn't know anything about science or healthcare or medicine? Why, in the middle of a pandemic, did you put in a radical, leftwing trial lawyer instead of someone that could help us beat this pandemic?

And for all the Democratic Senators who love to intone gravely ''Listen to the science,'' that is actually—that sentiment is correct. We should listen to the science, which means we should have someone leading HHS who knows something about science.

My career, as a lawyer, has been litigating cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. If a President asked me to lead the Department of HHS in the midst of a pandemic, I would tell that President: With all due respect, I don't have the professional experience or expertise to do that job. There are other jobs for which I would be qualified, but in a pandemic, the Health and Human Services Department should have someone who knows a damn thing about healthcare.

Instead of knowing anything about science or medicine or viruses or virology or immunizations, what Mr. Becerra does know about is persecuting citizens who don't share his radical, leftwing ideology.

Mr. Becerra, as attorney general of California, has demonstrated a consistent pattern of contempt for privacy. While attorney general, he used his partisan power to overcome the individual privacy rights of California. As attorney general, he demanded that thousands of registered charities annually disclose to his offices the names and addresses of major donors, even though California law didn't require that. But he used government power to violate their right to privacy. Then what did he do? Did he keep it private for law enforcement purposes to examine irregularities? No. Instead, he published the information from nearly 2,000 organizations, subjecting donors and those nonprofits to harassment and abuse.

Healthcare issues are personal. They are sensitive. When you and I go to the doctor, we don't expect our doctor to share our personal healthcare details with the world. Joe Biden has said to the American people: We are going to put someone in charge of the Health and Human Services Department who doesn't care about privacy and has a record of ignoring your right to privacy.

Later this year, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether Mr. Becerra's invasion of privacy violated the First Amendment to the Constitution. While his disregard for privacy is before the Supreme Court, what did Joe Biden do? He said: Let's put him in charge of healthcare in this country.

A third reason Mr. Becerra's nomination is so concerning concerns conscience protections.

The next HHS Secretary will be responsible for upholding the conscience protections that are written into Federal law to protect the rights of people of faith, whatever your faith—whether you are Christian or Jewish or Muslim or whatever your faith might be, the right of professionals, of citizens under the First Amendment to live according to their faith.

But Mr. Becerra, as attorney general, aggressively defended a California law that forced pro-life groups to advertise for abortion, a law that the Supreme Court deemed unconstitutional under the First Amendment.

Think about that for a second. He was so radical in going after and persecuting conscience rights, he wanted pro-life groups to advertise for abortion, and it took the U.S. Supreme Court to strike it down and say: That is unconstitutional. Joe Biden wants him to bring the same heavyhanded zealotry to the Health and Human Services Department.

And Mr. Becerra has not shown that it is just free speech that he has antagonism to, but it is religious liberty as well. Mr. Becerra has defended California's targeting of churches holding indoor services. The State of California concluded that if you go to an indoor service at a church and you pray or you sing or you worship, you are a public health menace. But if you go to a protest, if you go to other secular activities where the name of God is not invoked, then, magically, this virus is not contagious. It is ludicrous. It was facially absurd. It was driven by an unconstitutional animus toward people of faith, and it took the U.S. Supreme Court to strike it down and to say the policy that Mr. Becerra was defending is unconstitutional. Government cannot target people of faith.

So you have got a nominee with no healthcare experience, no medical experience, no scientific experience, but a record of being a radical, persecuting those with whom he disagrees, who has repeatedly gone before the U.S. Supreme Court and lost over and over again for violating the First Amendment, for violating free speech, for violating religious liberty. He is now currently before the Supreme Court for violating the privacy rights of Californians.

Do you want an HHS Secretary who doesn't respect your privacy, who doesn't respect your free speech or religious liberty? Do you want an HHS Secretary who is not qualified to draw blood or give a shot, who doesn't know how to distribute vaccines, who has never distributed anything?

If nominations and confirmations were based on the merits, were based on qualification to serve, Mr. Becerra's nomination would be rejected by this Senate by a vote of 100 to nothing. The fact that that is unlikely to happen and that every Democrat will march lockstep with the Biden administration to confirm a nominee who has no healthcare experience whatsoever in the midst of a global pandemic show just how profoundly partisan and radicalized today's Democratic Party is.

I believe all of us should be united in demanding a Health and Human Services Secretary who is actually qualified to protect our health and defeat this pandemic.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to vote against this nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I rise to speak this afternoon in support of the nomination of Xavier Becerra to serve as the next Secretary of Health and Human Services.

President Biden nominated Mr. Becerra, who currently serves as the attorney general of the State of California. Prior to his service in State government for the people of California, he served in the House of Representatives, representing a district in Los Angeles for 12 terms. He is someone I got to know in those years, especially in the debates about healthcare, which I will speak about in a moment.

But when a person is nominated to be a member of any Cabinet, they bring with them not just their experience but their life story, and Attorney General Becerra's story is a great American story. His own story and that of his family is a great American story, a story of hard work and sacrifice, overcoming obstacles, achieving excellence, not only in his time in school and his academic record but also excellence in his public service as he discharges the duties of the offices that he has held.

I mentioned that I knew him in the years we were debating healthcare here in Washington when he was a Member of the House. But just since his nomination, I met with him and questioned him closely on matters that are important to me and the people of Pennsylvania. I also asked him questions in not one but two—two—hearings because he just happens to be nominated to a Cabinet position where the confirmation is considered by two Senate committees, the Finance Committee and the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, so I had the chance to question him in both hearings, both committees.

Through these conversations and based upon his long and distinguished record of public service, Attorney General Becerra has demonstrated that he

is the kind of leader our Nation needs at HHS during this challenging time.

He is a proven leader who spent his career fighting to expand healthcare—to expand it—protecting both patients and consumers and working to strengthen both Medicare and Medicaid.

As a Congressman, as I mentioned, he was instrumental in drafting and working to pass the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the so-called ACA. And as California's attorney general, he has led the fight to protect it.

Now, my view of the disagreement on the other side of the aisle is just that. This is someone who worked as a Member of Congress and then has worked as attorney general to pass and then uphold the ACA.

On the other side of the aisle, they don't like that because they have been committed as a party here in the Senate and in the House—both Republican caucuses have been committed to two things on healthcare: destroying the ACA, which means destroying all protections for preexisting conditions and—it is important to add this—they have been dedicated to ending—not limiting, not cutting back—ending Medicaid expansion, which, of course, accounted for most of the healthcare gains. Millions of Americans have healthcare today because of the expansion of Medicaid. It is the official position of the Republican Party to end that—to say to all those millions of Americans: You don't deserve healthcare coverage. That is their position based upon what they have supported in bill after bill that came before the Senate. We know that. That is a fact. And until they move away from that position, they will try to take down the nomination of or oppose anyone who wants to uphold the ACA, uphold all protections for preexisting conditions, uphold and support the expansion of Medicaid, one of the best expansions of healthcare in American history, not just recent history, in all of American history.

So I would support Attorney General Becerra just based upon what he has done on healthcare because it happens to be in the best interests of the American people to expand healthcare and the best interests of the people I represent.

I don't come across many people in Pennsylvania coming up to me, saying: I want you to lessen the number of people in the United States or in my State that have healthcare. I want you to cut that back. I want you to cut back on the Medicaid Program—which folks on the other side of the aisle want to do as well.

They not only want to end Medicaid expansion—end it completely—they want to cut the Medicaid Program by hundreds of billions of dollars over 10 years. That is their official position. It has been their position for years to cut the Medicaid Program and to end Medicaid expansion—cut the Medicaid Program by hundreds of billions of dollars. So if you are against that, they are going to be opposing you, whether it is for confirmation or anything else, because they are the party that wants to cut Medicaid, not by $100 billion over 10 years, not by $200 billion or $300 billion. Look at their budgets year after year. They want to cut it $500 billion or $700 billion. One year they even proposed—here in the debates about the budgets, one year they even proposed cutting the Medicaid Program by $1 trillion. That was the official position of the Republican Party. So if you want to oppose them on that, then they will try to take you down.

The Medicaid Program, by the way, pays for half—almost half—of the births in America. Of the babies born in America, almost half of those births are paid for by Medicaid—the Medicaid Program—the program they want to cut by $500 billion, at least, and sometimes a lot more than that.

So that is why they are against him, because they want to cut back on healthcare.

Now, his leadership of this Agency could not come at a more important time. Our Nation is facing the greatest public health crisis in more than a century, since the horror of 1918. Now we are facing a similar challenge.

We also have a jobs crisis. So the faster we put this pandemic behind us, the better it is for creating a lot more jobs and lifting our economy out of the ditch that it has been in the last year.

So we need a strong leader at HHS. We need someone who has the experience, the integrity, to lead us in that Agency to help guide us out of the crisis. I am confident—very confident—that Xavier Becerra is that leader, and I urge my colleagues to vote in support of his nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The junior Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, the first thing I would like to do is correct what my colleague from Pennsylvania said with regard to preexisting conditions.

I was here last year. I brought to the floor a bill that would say it didn't matter what the Supreme Court did; we would make sure that we could keep preexisting conditions if the Supreme Court declared that the Affordable Care Act was not constitutional. The Democrats blocked it.

I have been up here 2 years, and I have never seen once my Republican colleagues want to reduce spending for Medicaid.

What I do think is unfair is, in my State of Florida, what money we receive from the Federal Government is significantly less per person than what a State like New York has. So I would like changes to the Medicaid Program. I would like it to be a fair program in which States like Florida will get treated just as well as States like New York.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 798

Madam President, I rise today to discuss an insane issue in the Democrats' COVID spending bill that we need to fix.

Tucked into the Democratic bill is a provision to give $1,400 stimulus checks to inmates. That is right. As our Nation faces a public health crisis and a crippling debt crisis, Democrats are handing out stimulus checks with your tax dollars to Federal inmates who don't pay income taxes, have all their needs—food and medical expenses included—paid for by taxpayers, and they do nothing to stimulate the economy. It simply doesn't make sense.

My friends and colleagues, Senators BILL CASSIDY, TOM COTTON, and TED CRUZ, tried to fix this by introducing an amendment to strip this out of the Democratic bill, but the Democrats wouldn't have it.

Senate Democrats voted unanimously to block the passage of that good amendment and chose instead to waste even more taxpayer dollars by sending $1,400 checks to inmates.

Let's talk about what that means for American taxpayers. There are nearly 1.5 million State and Federal inmates incarcerated in Federal prisons across the United States. These are people convicted of committing serious crimes and victimizing their fellow Americans.

Under this bill the Democrats passed, American taxpayers are on the hook for $1,400 checks to some of the most heinous people we have ever seen. I am talking about people like the racist Charleston Church shooter, Dylann Roof; serial rapist and predator, Larry Nassar; aspiring terrorist, Muhammad Dakhlalla, who tried to join ISIS and is now in prison in Georgia; convicted serial killer and rapist, Mark Goudeau, who is on death row in Arizona; convicted cop killer, Michael Addison, who is on death row in New Hampshire; and the monster who killed 17 innocent Floridians in Parkland at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on February 14, 2018.

How could anyone—anyone—possibly justify sending checks to these people?

If we send $1,400 checks to all State and Federal inmates, all 1.5 million, that is more than $2 billion—$2 billion in taxpayer money going to stimulus checks for inmates.

That is $2 billion that could be used to help our small businesses recover; $2 billion that could be used to enhance vaccine development and distribution so that more Americans can get the shots they need to move us forward and away from this virus; $2 billion that could be used to pay down some of our massive debt. There are so many positive uses for these funds that provide a real return for American taxpayers, but sending them to inmates isn't one of them. It is an unjustifiable expense that does nothing to fight COVID–19.

Today, I ask for full support of this body to strip this bad policy from law. We cannot forget that America is in a

debt crisis. I have been talking about it for a while, and I won't stop talking about it because it is a crisis my Democratic colleagues still don't seem to understand.

Right now, our Nation is headed toward $30 trillion in debt. Think about that—$30 trillion. The U.S. debt will be equal to $240,000 per taxpayer. That is insane. And what are the Democrats doing to rein in this unsustainable debt? Absolutely nothing.

In fact, the Democrats' wasteful and untargeted spending bill, which will raise the debt from $28 trillion to $30 trillion contains loads of handouts and provisions, just like this one, that recklessly spend on their priorities unrelated to COVID.

That is why I sent a letter to the Biden administration on Monday, urging him to rescind hundreds of billions in waste from this bill and create a targeted approach Americans truly need.

It is clear that Democrats are living in a fantasy land where debt doesn't matter, spending has no consequences, and inflation is impossible. Of course, reasonable Americans know that is not true.

The Biden administration needs to take immediate action to request the rescission of the non-COVID-related, liberal agenda-driven, and wasteful funding found throughout this bill.

So I will keep fighting to cut down on this liberal wish list. Today, we can start that important work and pass my bill to not only save $2 billion from going to inmates who have no need for the money, but also show the American people that Congress is committed to remaining fully accountable to the American people for the proper stewardship of tax dollars.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 798, introduced earlier today. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Madam President, today the Republicans are showing some real chutzpa.

On this issue, Republicans were for it before they were against it. Today, they claim to want to target prisoners. The real harm they are doing is to innocent children and families.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The junior Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Madam President, it is hard to imagine that my colleague just rose in opposition to this good bill.

Let's be clear. By objecting to this bill, Democrats are standing in full support of spending $2 billion to send $1,400 checks to inmates. Democrats want to spend $2 billion in taxpayer money to send checks to people in prison, convicted of committing serious crimes and victimizing their fellow Americans.

That means Democrats are saying that they want American taxpayers to be on the hook for $1,400 checks to some of the most heinous criminals we have ever seen—people like Dylann Roof and the Parkland shooter.

How can anyone justify sending checks to these people? Let's remember, inmates don't pay income taxes. They have all their needs, food and medical expenses included, paid for by taxpayers. They don't do anything to stimulate our economy.

I do hope my colleague will reconsider his objection and stand with me in putting accountability to American taxpayers over this insane policy that does nothing but throw $2 billion we don't have out the window.

Thank you, Madam President.

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.

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

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

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I wish you and I wish everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day. It is a big day for celebration up in Boston and all of Massachusetts and all across the country and the world. On St. Patrick's Day, everyone is Irish. So I wish everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day today.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Madam President, right now on the floor of the U.S. Senate is a reason not to be so happy, and that is why I look forward to very soon casting my vote to confirm Xavier Becerra to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, one of the most qualified and forward-thinking minds that will have ever run the Department of Health and Human Services.

But today, Republicans are using this confirmation vote to continue their agenda of obstruction, deflecting attention away from the nominee who will be the head of the chief Federal Agency responding to the coronavirus crisis—all to revive an unnecessary, blatantly political debate on reproductive rights. This ridiculous delay tactic only highlights how out of step with the American people the Senate Republicans are.

Their anti-choice, anti-woman, and anti-health rhetoric is on full display here on the Senate floor, and, sadly, it is not new. They want to roll back Roe v. Wade. They want to criminalize abortion care. They want the government to control women and their bodies. They want to roll back title IX protections for women on university campuses and completely gut the title X program to fund critical healthcare providers like Planned Parenthood.

Republicans have put in place an anti-choice majority on the U.S. Supreme Court by confirming Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh and illegitimately filling Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's seat with Amy Coney Barrett. If there ever were a reason to abolish the filibuster, it is to ensure that we pass legislation to expand the Supreme Court so it cannot overturn Roe v. Wade and set us back decades in the fight for equal access to healthcare in our country.

But here today, the Republicans are attempting to disrupt the nomination of our Secretary of Health and Human Services with a craven political play to their base at the expense of the health of Americans. They would rather play politics than confirm President Biden's Cabinet nominees. They would rather remain beholden to the far-right's interest groups than do the work the American people sent us here to do.

For the past 4 years, the Trump administration emboldened these groups with dangerous rhetoric and far-right policies. But in November, how did the American people respond? They voted him out and gave the Democrats the Senate majority. Americans entrusted us to serve them, not fringe interest groups who want to turn back the clocks on healthcare and women's rights. That is why I stand on the floor of the U.S. Senate today to say abortion is healthcare.

We cannot stand for any more disparities, delays, or denials. More than ever in this country, we need to stand up and raise our voices against the Republican's work to restrict access to reproductive health services. We have a fight ahead of us—a fight to protect reproductive freedom, a fight to make sure that birth control is affordable and available, and a fight for title X to ensure that low-income patients receive quality family planning and reproductive health services.

Voters expect the Biden-Harris administration to take bold steps to protect and expand access to reproductive healthcare and freedoms, to ensure that every person has the fundamental right to make their own healthcare decisions, and they expect it because they want it.

Public support for Roe v. Wade is at a record high. Seventy-seven percent of Americans support that historic Supreme Court decision. That goes beyond a simple majority to an overwhelming consensus. A couple of years ago, one analysis of polling found that there is not a single State in the United States where a majority of voters support ''making abortion illegal in all circumstances.'' The American people have moved past that debate that Republicans seem committed to resuscitating on the floor today. They are on the wrong side of history and the wrong side of the American people.

So as Republicans try to hijack this confirmation vote on Xavier Becerra,

all I can say is, enough. Enough with the era of extreme bodily discrimination. Enough with outside entities taking control over what a woman can and cannot do with her body. Enough with mounting barriers to reproductive services and birth control. Enough with criminalization of abortion care. Enough with creating roadblocks for poor women, immigrant women, and women of color to get equal access to healthcare. Enough with this offensive debate steeped in misogyny, partisanship, and tyranny.

It is time to guarantee quality, affordable healthcare regardless of race, status, or gender. It is time to rectify the healthcare and reproductive injustices that have cost too many lives for too long. We must move away from the antiquated and ideological debate over women's bodies and recognize the spaces in which our government can promote equity. We can reshape policy to reflect the constitutional rights of all people.

By delaying Xavier Becerra's nomination to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, Republicans seem more interested in denying the health rights of half of Americans than in protecting the health of all Americans.

Plain and simple, Xavier Becerra is exceedingly qualified to be our next Health and Human Services Secretary. He has proven that he prioritizes science and facts, believes in each person's right to make health and medical decisions about their own bodies, and is dedicated to fighting for those most vulnerable in our society. His record and support for reproductive freedom reflect the will of the vast majority of Americans who support legal access to abortion. He is committed to reproductive freedom and understands the importance of ensuring people have access to the accurate information they need to make the best decisions for their lives and for their families.

Xavier Becerra knows what is at stake, and I have the utmost confidence that he will lead with conviction, with compassion, and with care, and is ready to undo the damage that has been done by his predecessors.

As America continues to battle the coronavirus pandemic, his confirmation is long overdue. I am proud to support Xavier Becerra today as Secretary of Health and Human Services. He will be one of the greatest Secretaries our country has ever known.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from New Jersey.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I come to the floor today to discuss yesterday's report from the Intelligence Committee, a public report, which confirmed what we all suspected last year: that the Russian Federation favored Donald Trump's reelection and sought to influence the outcome by amplifying attacks on Joe Biden and his family. While the scale of interference appears to be less than what we saw in 2016, the receptiveness of Trump's inner circle appears to have been about the same. They were open for business.

I am not here to relitigate the 2016 or 2020 elections; I am here to raise my concern with the fact that, for two election cycles in a row now, the Republican Party's nominee for President sought to normalize foreign interference in our elections. And I want to be clear. It is wrong, it is hostile, it is undemocratic, and it must stop if you want the American people to have the confidence in the legitimacy and the credibility of our elections going forward.

This is not about party; this is about the durability of our democracy. Everyone in this body has an important role to play in rejecting foreign interference and restoring trust in our election process.

While the contents of the report came as no surprise, its findings were nonetheless breathtaking. Our intelligence community is highly confident—the highest assessment they have on any given issue—in its assessment that Vladimir Putin was involved in the operation whereby Andrii Derkach and Konstantin Kilimnik successfully manipulated President Trump's inner circle, including his personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani.

Thankfully, the American people had better sense than Mr. Giuliani and rejected the Kremlin-backed lies about Joe Biden and his family. That, however, does not diminish the fact that the Russian Government undertook this effort and the former President welcomed it. The Russian interference detailed in this report occurred at the very same time the Trump administration sought to publicly downplay the role played by Russia.

This report was mandated by Congress and for good reason. Americans deserve to know exactly who is interfering in our democracy and how. As I said before, everyone has a role to play, including the American people. We have to encourage Americans to practice better cyber security and to scrutinize the information they see on the web. Carefully examining social media posts before sharing them must become the new hallmark of a patriotic, active, and informed citizenry. And our social media companies must do a better job stopping the proliferation of foreign disinformation on their platforms.

The health of our democracy depends on this vigilance. The Kremlin will continue to attack our elections and seek to sow divisions among us. We have a responsibility to resist this interference and not make their job any easier.

We live in a media environment where Donald Trump and his Republican allies continue to this day to promote unhinged conspiracy theories that the election was stolen. The intelligence report confirms this is not true.

Some Republican officials have promoted wild conspiracy theories that China supported Democratic campaigns. The intelligence report confirms this was not true.

Former President Trump and his allies still assert that Venezuela manipulated voting machines. A companion report by the Department of Justice and Homeland Security confirmed this is not true.

We must come to terms with the fact that while Russia has aggressively promoted disinformation in our country, the most pernicious engine of lies in the United States is cast by the former President himself.

Knowing the facts sets a foundation for action, and I look forward to engaging with this administration on measures to respond to our intelligence community's findings. There should be sanctions required in response to this interference, and the administration should move quickly to impose them.

I welcome the approach thus far by the Biden administration as it crafts a Russia policy that calls out Kremlin aggression when it happens and takes strong measures in response. The sanctions imposed in response to the Navalny assassination attempt demonstrate that such reckless and dangerous behavior will not be tolerated. And our efforts to hold the Kremlin accountable will include close coordination with our European allies.

The package of sanctions announced on March 2 shows how committed the Biden administration is to confronting Kremlin aggression. This type of rigor in the development of sanctions packages is a welcome reminder of how our government should work. The Navalny sanctions were a good first step, and I look forward to soon seeing the results of the administration's review of Russia policy. In my view, we need a strategy that accomplishes four main goals.

One, limiting the Kremlin's ability to interfere in our democracy as well as those of our allies and partners. This includes a comprehensive plan to counter Russian-generated propaganda and corruption around the world.

Two, standing up for our friends in Ukraine who are literally on the frontlines battling Kremlin aggression. They need our diplomatic support in Europe. They need our security assistance to defend themselves. They need our encouragement to reform democratic institutions. I hope that President Biden will soon speak with President Zelensky to send these important messages.

Three, we have a responsibility to engage with the Russian Government when it is in our national security interests. I supported the extension of the New START agreement and urge the administration to continue to advance arms control policies that advance stability and our national security.

Finally, our Russia policy must extend a hand to the Russian people, many of whom have courageously turned out by the thousands in opposition to Putin and his government. Their struggle for democracy is theirs,

not ours, but we must make clear that our disagreements are not with them but with Vladimir Putin and his corrupt, autocratic regime.

Defending our elections isn't just about strong cyber measures, protecting the ballot box, and promoting better practices on social media. It is about having a foreign policy that clearly communicates our values and interests, one that leaves no room for debate over the openness of any American President to foreign interference. It is about a foreign policy that recognizes how the Kremlin's efforts to weaken democracy in Ukraine or in other European countries ultimately threatens democracy here in the United States. It is about a foreign policy that works with allies and partners, not one that denigrates them at every turn.

The intelligence community is getting better at detecting and guarding against interference, but we must remain vigilant. Russia and other foreign actors will continue to attack our democratic process. Their tactics may evolve, but their intentions remain the same, and we need to stay one step ahead of them.

The Biden administration is off to a good start in defending our democracy. As chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, I look forward to working together to advance policies that reflect America's time-honored democratic values both at him and abroad.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY

Madam President, parliamentary inquiry: Is there a time limit that we are in the midst of?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. We are in postcloture on the Becerra nomination. Each Senator has up to 1 hour.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Further parliamentary inquiry: Is there a limit on time divided by side or is the floor open regardless?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The floor is open to any Senator who seeks recognition.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Madam President, just switching very briefly, I want to urge my colleagues to join me in support of the nomination of Xavier Becerra to serve as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

I consider Mr. Becerra a friend. I had the privilege of serving with him in the House of Representatives. In fact, we both came to Congress at the same time, a time, I might add, when there were far fewer Latinos elected to Federal office than we have today.

As a member of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Health, Mr. Becerra frequently spoke up for the many Americans left behind by our healthcare system: seniors facing sky-high prescription drug bills, patients with preexisting conditions, children, and the working poor.

Furthermore, he played an active role in the effort to pass the Affordable Care Act, a landmark law that since 2010 has changed the lives of millions of Americans in New Jersey and across the Nation for the better.

As California's attorney general, no one has fought harder to protect the Affordable Care Act than Xavier Becerra. And if confirmed to this position, no one will work harder to protect and improve access to healthcare than he will.

As the first Secretary of Health and Human Services of Latino descent, I know that Mr. Becerra will focus a great deal on addressing the health disparities that are harming so many lower income and minority communities nationwide, disparities we saw played out over the past year as COVID–19 claimed a disproportionate number of Black and Brown lives.

Mr. Becerra will also work to undo the damage wrought by the Trump administration to our healthcare system, from weakening nursing home standards that left seniors more vulnerable in this pandemic to allowing health insurers to, once again, sell shoddy, skimpy plans to consumers that failed to protect them from massive medical bills.

And, finally, I want to address some of the criticisms I have heard from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle regarding Mr. Becerra's qualifications. The notion that Mr. Becerra has no managerial experience is laughable, given that as California's attorney general, he has successfully led the second largest Justice Department in the Nation, second only to the U.S. Department of Justice.

And it is not lost on me that those questioning Mr. Becerra's credentials are the very same colleagues who claim that Congressman Tom Price's background as a doctor qualified him to lead an Agency that touches the lives of every single person in our great land. Well, he was a disaster and did not last a full year as Secretary of HHS. And the immediate past Secretary was a lawyer who did a good job in his pharmaceutical firm of dramatically pushing up insulin prices.

So I am confident that both Mr. Becerra's passion for healthcare issues, as demonstrated throughout his tenure in Congress, and his record as California's attorney general will serve him well as Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I urge my colleagues to support his nomination. He will lead this Agency with integrity and, most importantly, make the health of the American people his No. 1 priority.

With that, I yield the floor and thank my colleague from Ohio for indulging my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, I rise to speak in favor of Xavier Becerra, as Senator MENENDEZ just did.

Like Senator MENENDEZ, when Xavier and I came, we all were in the first class in 1992 together. I consider him a friend also and have admired the work that he did as a Member of Congress, as attorney general, and the work that he will do at HHS.

In the middle of the worst health crisis of our lifetime, we need someone leading this Department who understands the importance of public health and who will work to build a stronger, more affordable healthcare system for the future. That is what Xavier Becerra will do.

He has the experience for this job. As Senator MENENDEZ pointed out, he ran the Nation's second largest law firm. He helped pass the Affordable Care Act, as a Member of the House, that expanded coverage to millions of Ohioans and tens of millions of Americans.

I think the Republican opposition, all partisan opposition, to Attorney General Becerra for Secretary of HHS, as Senator CASEY pointed out, is all about their opposition to the Affordable Care Act, their opposition to expansion of Medicaid. I heard one Senator after another say their State isn't treated right by Medicaid, but they didn't even expand Medicaid in many of those States.

As State attorney general, he took on tobacco companies, drug companies, opioid manufacturers, and polluters. That is another reason Republicans oppose him, because he took on their biggest contributors and their sponsors and the people they come to the Senate and fight for. That willingness to stand up to big drug companies is going to be more important than ever in the years ahead.

The cost of prescription drugs eats away at the budget of seniors and families in Cleveland and Akron and Mansfield and Youngstown and Dayton. I look forward to working with future Secretary Becerra to bring down those drug prices. I also hope we can work together to expand the Affordable Care Act and to make it work even better for the families.

We started this month, and the Presiding Officer from Wisconsin was a part of this, with the American Rescue Plan. People buying healthcare in the ACA exchanges are going to have lower premiums because of the rescue plan.

Mr. Becerra will work to undo the vast disparities in healthcare in our country. This pandemic has been the great revealer. It has shown how unequal access to care and pollution and biases in the system and so much else have hurt the health of Black and Brown Americans for generations.

We need to start with getting accurate data on how different communities have been hurt by this pandemic, something I have pushed for over the past year and something I know will be a priority to the new Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I urge my colleagues to join me in confirming him so he can work to help get every American vaccinated, to expand PPE and COVID testing supplies, and to build a stronger healthcare system for the future.

CONFIRMATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, for decades, Ohio workers have watched the spread of a corporate business model where companies shut down production in Toledo or Dayton or Gallipolis or Youngstown. They collected a tax break to move jobs to Mexico or China where they can exploit workers only to sell their products back into the United States. Ohioans live with those consequences every day.

Last week, 81 workers in Bucyrus, OH, had their jobs outsourced to China, where GE-Savant moved production of its high-efficiency light bulbs overseas. Now, 81 union workers are facing tough conversations at the kitchen tables: How will their families survive; will they fall behind on their rent or their mortgage; do they move away with their kids; will their kids have to change schools—all those decisions that families have to make when workers or when plants shut down and move overseas.

The Presiding Officer from Wisconsin has been involved in this fight ever since her career began in the House 20-plus years ago, and I have worked alongside with her to make sure that we have a different trade policy. But when one production line closes, the ripple effect extends, as we know, to the whole community, to other workers and communities in the supply chain.

Yesterday, people in Northeast Ohio, in the Cleveland area, woke up to headlines about yet another American corporation deciding to build things in Mexico instead of Ohio with Ford breaking its promise to invest $900 million in Avon Lake.

I got a call 2 days ago from a smalltown mayor, John Hunter, mayor of Sheffield Lake, OH, a longtime Ford—he was a Ford worker, retired, now mayor of Sheffield Village. He talked about how Ford had promised, at the bargaining table in 2019, that they would invest $900 million in this Avon Lake plant. Ohioans are tired of watching corporation after corporation abandon the workers and communities that have made their businesses successful.

We are being told that production of cheap, simple products will be shipped overseas, while innovative, high-value products will be made in the United States by American workers. We see in Bucyrus, we see in Avon Lake that that is just not true, and we are sick of it. Our trade policy has to change.

That is why today was a good day for this country. Katherine Tai was confirmed by this body 98 to nothing. She understands trade policy. She is the right leader to take us in a new direction on trade with American workers at the center. She is a serious expert. She is respected on both sides of the aisle. We saw that in that vote today. She has a proven track record of making progress for workers.

Last year, I voted for a trade agreement for the first time ever in my career because of our work with Senator WYDEN to fix the Trump administration's corporate trade agreement. He said it was a new NAFTA. It was really a tired, old, mostly the same NAFTA, rebranded as USMCA. We went to work. We secured groundbreaking new worker protections. Katherine Tai was one of the key policymakers who worked with us to make that happen. She was in the negotiations. She was in the discussions. She helped Senator WYDEN and I make this a much better bill that people, like a whole lot of us, as progressives, pro-worker Senators, could vote for.

Her work helped us make the first improvement to enforcing labor standards in our trade agreements enforceable, serious labor standards, since we have been negotiating them.

We know why companies close factories in Ohio and open them in Mexico. They can pay lower wages. They can take advantage of workers who don't have rights. American workers can't compete. We get a race to the bottom on wages and benefits.

The only way of stopping it is raising labor standards in every country we trade with and making sure those labor standards are enforced.

That is what Katherine Tai will do. She will enforce the laws we already have. She will stand up for American workers. She will fight for American businesses when countries cheat the rules. She will work with us to level the playing field so steelworkers and autoworkers and communication workers in Ohio and Wisconsin and all over the country can compete.

She won't allow corporate lobbyists to write trade agreements. We have seen it. Since I came to the Congress, we have seen it with NAFTA. We have seen it with CAFTA. We have seen it with PNTR. We have seen it with agreement after agreement after agreement: Corporate lobbyists write trade agreements. Workers are locked out of the room.

Now, with U.S. Trade Rep Tai's confirmation—the nominee, of course—I asked her what she will do to start to regain the trust of Americans in trade. She said:

> You start by listening.

She then talked about the Mahoning Valley, Youngstown area in my State, listening to and understanding the concerns of communities that have gotten hurt over and over.

The administration's outline for its 2021 agenda, trade agenda, which Miss Tai will be charged with carrying out, says that ''trade policy should respect the dignity of work.''

> Trade policy should respect the dignity of work and value Americans as workers and wage earners.

Imagine that; that our trade policy, never before have we seen this respecting the dignity of work and valuing Americans as workers and wage earners. That is the kind of thinking we need leading our trade policy.

As the first woman of color to ever serve as the President's chief trade adviser, Katherine Tai knows how important it is for the people in the room making trade decisions to actually reflect, to actually reflect the diverse workforce that our trade policy affects.

We know one good appointment and one good provision won't stop outsourcing, but I am always going to be straight with American workers. We have come a long, long way, but we have a long, long way to go to undo the damage our trade policies have done over the past three decades.

As the Presiding Officer, I have stood up to Presidents of both parties on trade throughout my career. That is not going to change. One of my proudest votes was one of my first votes, and that was against the North American Free Trade Agreement.

I will continue to watch closely what this administration does. If they show any hint of reverting back to the old way of doing things, of letting corporations dictate trade policy at the expense of workers, they will hear about it from me. This is going to be a constant effort over many years.

As thrilled as I am with Katherine Tai, we know we still have a job to do to reorient trade agreements and trade laws that are a priority; that our emphasis no longer is corporations, but it is American workers. It has to be coupled with real investment in the communities that have been hollowed out because of Washington's and Wall Street's past mistakes. It has to be paired with an overhaul of our Tax Code to end, once and for all, the tax breaks paid for by Ohioans and others to send production overseas.

Trade doesn't happen in a vacuum. Our policies must work together to create a global market where workers are treated with dignity; they are safe on the job; they are paid fair wages; they are able to bargain collectively; they are able to bargain collectively for better pay and benefits.

When you love this country, you fight for the people who make it work. That is what Katherine Tai will do.

I thank my colleagues for the strong vote in support of her confirmation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The junior Senator from Maryland.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Madam President, I rise today in strong support for the confirmation of California's attorney general, Xavier Becerra, to be the next Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I am absolutely confident that Mr. Becerra has the knowledge, the experience, the skills, and, just as importantly, the values and principles required of this job—a job that will play a key role in beating the coronavirus and tackling the urgent issues of equity and affordability now facing our healthcare system.

I am especially confident in my assessment of Xavier Becerra because I have known him personally for years, both as a former colleague and as a

friend. I first met then-Congressman Becerra in the House of Representatives, where he served for over two decades with myself and the Presiding Officer and others, and where he was a champion for the healthcare rights of the American people, working overtime to make sure that every American had access to quality, affordable healthcare.

We served together in the House Democratic leadership, and we served together on the House Ways and Means Committee. So I have had an opportunity to see his legislative talents up front and also to witness his love of service to our country.

We worked together to halt a number of proposals that maybe some of our Republican colleagues here in the Senate were pushing for, including the proposal that continuously appeared in the House Republican budget to voucherize the Medicare Program. One of the former Speakers of the House wanted to essentially provide seniors on Medicare with a voucher and send them out into more of a private marketplace. It would have ended up putting our seniors more at risk. So together we did battle that idea.

We served together on what was known as the Congressional Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, also known as the ''supercommittee,'' and known to some as the ''not-so-super committee.'' I saw him work to try to achieve agreements on some of the biggest challenges facing our country, but, like him, we both agreed that we weren't going to do that at the expense of protecting Medicare for seniors, protecting Medicaid as an absolutely essential healthcare safety net for tens of millions of Americans, and we were not prepared to provide more tax cuts to the very wealthiest of Americans.

It is in that last effort where Xavier Becerra, I think, really distinguished himself in the House, when it came to the issue of equity and healthcare. I know the Presiding Officer knows well the battles we all went in together in the development and passage of the Affordable Care Act, and it was that that really defined Mr. Becerra's legacy in the House.

He championed the Affordable Care Act from the very start. He helped both to write and to pass this landmark law that now helps tens of millions of our fellow Americans, and after leaving the Congress, he led the charge to defend the Affordable Care Act against the Texas case before the Supreme Court of the United States.

Now, I know a lot of our Republican colleagues have also spent years fighting the Affordable Care Act. We have seen that play out here in the U.S. Senate within the last couple years. But the reality is the Affordable Care Act is very important to the overwhelming majority of the American people who support it and is an essential lifeline to quality, affordable healthcare for tens of millions of Americans. And it is that that Mr. Becerra fought to pass and which he has fought to defend against constant attacks in the courts.

There is no question that Xavier Becerra fights for what he believes is right, as he should, but that has never prevented him from working across the aisle to get things done. As the attorney general in the State of California, he has repeatedly partnered with Republicans to solve the pressing issues facing our fellow citizens.

He builds bridges every day and has worked across party lines to expand access to COVID–19 treatments, to confront the opioid crisis, and to address the dangers of vaping and smoking among our Nation's youth.

His record shows that Attorney General Becerra fights for what is important to the people he represents, not the party he belongs to, and he has demonstrated it by example time and time again with his ability to bridge deep divisions, even during this time of division. I know that he will fight hard for each and every one of our fellow citizens and will not look to see whether somebody is a Democrat or a Republican or from some other party. What he cares about is making sure he is looking out for the healthcare of every American.

And, at this moment, everyone in this country stands to benefit from an effective leader at the helm of the Department of Health and Human Services. Our most pressing task is to contain the spread of COVID–19 and to defeat COVID–19. That requires clear messaging on public health measures. That requires accelerating the distribution of vaccines and treatment and testing and making sure we do all of that in an equitable way. That means safely guiding the opening of our schools, and we all want our students to get back to school as quickly as possible and as safely as possible.

As the attorney general of California, he has led one of the largest departments of justice in the country, and, in that capacity, has stood up for strong consumer and worker protections throughout this pandemic and before, and I trust that he will continue to do so for all Americans as Secretary of HHS, if confirmed.

We know that this public emergency and health crisis has been a blow to our country. It has also laid bare the fault lines in our healthcare system in terms of racial inequities, inaccessibility for underserved communities, and underinvestment in our public health infrastructure. These issues, of course, predated COVID–19, but we must tackle them with renewed urgency as we emerge from this crisis.

Mr. Becerra is equipped to root out these disparities, both because of his knowledge and skill and expertise but also because of his lived experience. Xavier grew up in a working-class Latino family. He knows the communities that are hurting most because he has lived in those communities. He would bring to this important office not only his expertise and skill but the empathy and the compassion needed to help those most in need.

Like most of us, Mr. Becerra is also guided and motivated by what makes him most proud: his family. At his confirmation hearing, he spoke movingly about his wife and his children, who are all a part of all that he does. And he spoke about his parents, who traveled to this country from Mexico seeking a better life, with nothing more than, in Xavier's words, ''their health and their hope.''

It is that health and that hope that propelled Mr. Becerra into a life of public service, and it is that health and that hope that will animate his leadership at the Department of Health and Human Services, should he be confirmed by this Senate.

He was brought up in a family that believed in and sought the American dream, and he has spent his life fighting to make that dream real for families across this Nation. He believes, as I believe, that that mission requires us to care for the health and safety of each and every one of our fellow citizens, and I have full confidence that he is up to the task.

Colleagues, I urge us to confirm the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be the next Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HASSAN). The Senator from Indiana.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 730

Mr. BRAUN. Madam President, this past year has been hard on Hoosiers and Americans across the country. When the economy was shut down, Congress got to work. Given my background as a business owner, I was involved in negotiating the Paycheck Protection Program, known as PPP, as part of the CARES Act, one of five bills that passed in 2020 with overwhelming support, I think 90-plus votes. We worked it out, Democrats and Republicans, together.

Those COVID-related packages totaled $4 trillion, and we didn't have a penny saved up ahead of time to prepare for it. That is part of a deeper problem with this institution, is that we borrow anything that we spend money on, even 23 percent of our annual operating budget. To put that in perspective, imagine if you had a business doing $100,000 in revenue, and you are losing $23,000, and then you go to your banker and expect them to bail you out. It wouldn't make sense.

We came into 2021 with over $1 trillion from those packages unspent, unobligated. Instead of working with us like before, Democrats did shut us out of the process. In fact, the Senate as a whole did not work the bill through committees. It was laid to us, on the Senate, by the House, all $1.9 trillion of it.

Before this, some Republicans went to the White House to talk with the President about a bipartisan plan, knowing all the money would be borrowed again, but nothing came to fruition. Instead, we stayed up all night;

finished the bill at noon the next day, Saturday; spent 29 hours on the floor, and not a single Republican amendment was adopted in this massive spending bill.

Instead of focusing on the virus and getting our economy back on track, this became an exercise in ramming something through that was a liberal wish list. Only 1 percent of the bill—1 percent of the bill—went toward the vaccine. Less than 9 percent goes toward COVID–19 public health issues generally.

While the Congressional Budget Office projects the economy to return to prepandemic levels by midyear, only 5 percent of the $130 billion for K–12 schools gets spent this year, and none of it is tied to reopening our schools, which many States had shut down early and opened up late.

Included in this package is a whopping $350 billion for State and local governments. I had a conversation with our own Governor 2, 3 weeks ago. A place like Indiana, and I believe West Virginia as well, probably runs balanced budgets. We do it with the guardrail of a constitutional amendment. Many other States, if they don't have a constitutional amendment, they have a statute. In other words, you do what households do. You do what all businesses do. You live within your means. And here, when you run your State governments in a way that in good times, you can't make ends meet, and you look to the Federal Government to bail out your bad governance, it is a whole nother issue.

Even left-leaning economists and think tanks are worried about what this is going to do down the road because most of the time, you don't feel the repercussions until later. And, of course, that could show up in inflation. It could show up in a way similar to what we dealt with in the late seventies and the early eighties.

Forty-four States had surpluses last year, when you look at COVID funding. Many places, like California, had surpluses. Then they reconfigured how this was done not based on pro rata population but rewarded the States with the highest unemployment levels. It sounds bizarro to me.

Governor Holcomb in Indiana has done a great job balancing the economy with public safety, and that is why our unemployment rate is now close to a full employment rate. It was the lowest in the Midwest going into it because we have a good business climate, and we have a low cost of living. Things work there. Sadly, the Democrats' bill punishes States like Indiana for safely reopening. The higher a State's unemployment rate, again, the more bailout money you get proportionately.

But it goes one step further, and this is the part that caught my attention. I am interested in hearing the explanation for it. I think it was a sneaky maneuver when you put it in such a large bill that had other doozies like stimulus checks for undocumented immigrants, for felons, all kinds of stuff that I think, when you look at it, shouldn't have been in there. But when it is that massive—it takes 10, 11 hours to read out loud—you are going to get some of that. What this does is say that if a State takes Federal money, they cannot lower their State taxes in any way through 2024.

First of all, I believe this is unconstitutional and coercive. Second, we should never punish States for putting taxpayers first. We serve the public and should be good stewards of their money, and especially a place like this that runs the way it does day in and day out should not be telling States that run their operations responsibly that they cannot do what they want with spending or taxation.

My bill strikes the provision that prohibits States' ability to change revenues as they see fit for their State's unique needs.

Second, my bill strips out the reporting requirement where States have to tell the Federal Government about every revenue source and amount of money they take in. This place ought to be doing that routinely to all the people who send it revenue.

This bill has the support of over 25 groups, including the American Legislative Exchange Council, Americans for Prosperity, Americans for Tax Reform, Citizens Against Government Waste, Club for Growth, FreedomWorks, Heritage Action for America, Independent Women's Forum, and the National Taxpayers Union, among others. We expect many more to join in coming days. I am sure many stakeholders in Indiana and in West Virginia not mentioned will throw in support as well.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Finance Committee ranking member, Senator CRAPO, for cosponsoring this legislation—and others, including Senators BLACKBURN, CAPITO, INHOFE, MARSHALL, RUBIO, RICK SCOTT, TILLIS, and Senator YOUNG from my home State.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of S. 730 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MANCHIN. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, my good friend the Senator from Indiana—I am hoping this is a misunderstanding, and I hope I can explain it because I was very much involved in this process.

First of all, as a former Governor, I know about the budget process. I know about balanced budgets. I used to meet every Tuesday afternoon. As Governor, I would have my finance people come to my office, and we would sit down and look at the revenue estimates. We had to make adjustments because we had a balanced budget amendment. Isn't that a novelty, a balanced budget amendment? We had to live within our confines. That is something that no one who has ever been in State government or ever run a business understands. I understand that. But it is something that we did very religiously.

The language in this bill, Senator from Indiana, the only thing this bill does—or that language you were concerned about, the only thing it did—you can cut all you want to. You can manage all your money the way you want. You just can't take Federal money and use it if you cut your revenue intentionally. That is all. What we try to do is target where the money has gone.

So the Treasury, you have to go—as a State, you go to the Treasury, and you show the need that you have. You show the cost—what COVID has cost your revenue and you are able to have money to replace that because COVID caused you that problem.

You have also the ability to use this, in your State, for three things: water, sewer, and internet service. So you have infrastructure that can be done.

Also, what we did in this bill is we have it going out to 2024, so you are not going to overheat, if you will—overheat or overcharge the economy. They can spread that out. The State and local moneys go in two tranches: Half this year, half next year is what you can access. The money to every one of your communities—for the first time, 40 percent of that total money goes directly, so your large cities will get money directly from the Treasury. They have to show how they are using it for their backfill, not, basically, having anything to do with what their tax revenue is. They just can't use this money to backfill tax cuts if they want to do that. That is pretty simple because there is not a need for it. If you can reduce your taxes, then you don't need Federal dollars to backfill to show that you are in good shape. But if you need it for anything else, you can use it for that. You can use it for all these things.

I can tell you—I would assure you that every incorporated city in Indiana, every county in Indiana has to be thrilled. They have to be thrilled for the first time to have control of their destiny. That was our intention.

In the first CARES package, that never happened. The first CARES package went directly to the Governors, and if the Governors were very prudent in how they did it—set up a committee, worked through the legislature—some did, some didn't, and there is a lot of money that never got into the basic fibers of your State or my State. Now that is not going to be the problem.

Also, they have the ability, if they have a water project they have been

trying to do forever and never had the resources to do it, they can use their money for that.

If they have a sewer project—I have said this: How do we pick water, sewer, and internet? They are not the sexy things that, basically, Governors and politicians go out and cut ribbons for—a sewer line or a water line that is buried 50 feet down. That is not a sexy thing.

We knew the infrastructure was falling apart city by city and the ages of water lines are over 80 years in most of our cities. So we tried to do something.

They have until 2024, so they don't have to throw it out. It is not shovel-ready. It is a project you have been wanting to do but never could afford.

I assure you, we do not want to impede good fiscal management to make adjustments to do whatever they want to their tax codes. This does not prohibit that. It just prohibits using and going to the Federal Treasury and saying: I have a loss of revenue because I cut $100 billion or I cut $100 million or a billion dollars out of my State budget when I reduced taxes, and now I can't pay my bills.

Also, you can't use this money from the Federal Government for your pensions. That is a responsibility that we have. We call it OPEB, other postponed employment benefits. OPEB is other postponed employment benefits—pensions, healthcare, all the things that when a person retires from their State, these are things that the State has a contract and an obligation for them in their retirement. It is the responsibility of the States to manage that, and that, basically, keeps the State in a good financial position. It keeps your credit rating up or your credit rating low if you have managed yourself through it. This is only to help you with expenses and extraordinary expenses that you incurred during COVID. That is all, sir.

I don't want the State of Indiana or any State to think that they can't do whatever they want to with their taxes. They just can't use the Federal Treasury to backfill something done deliberately, basically, or self-inflicted—a loss of revenue. That is about it in a nutshell.

COVID–19 is the greatest challenge we have ever had. I know you mentioned a few things. I will tell you this because my dear friend from Maine is sitting here. We met quite a bit on the bill in a bipartisan way, even though a lot of it did not get in. The bill was bigger than what my friends—all of you, my friends on the Republican side—could basically vote for. I understand that.

But please understand there are an awful lot of things we talked about that I did everything in my power to make sure the tranches—spreading them out, not going it all at one time. There is the RESTAURANTS Act. Senator WICKER and Senator SINEMA were on the RESTAURANTS Act. There was, basically, the homeless children's bill that Senator MURKOWSKI and myself put in there. There was bipartisanship in that.

There should have been a lot more; I agree. We both know the process sometimes doesn't work the way we want it to. But you make every effort you can to make it work. I did that. Whenever I talked, I said that this had bipartisan input. It didn't come out as a bipartisan vote, but there was bipartisan input into this piece of legislation, the best we possibly could.

I think it is a piece of legislation that we—if you have education, there is not a school in America today that should not be able to have a program where they can make their school the safest environment that a child should be in. Every parent should be safe in thinking their children are in a safe place because of heating, ventilation—things that we have in this bill that allow education to have the resources it needs and, also, your higher education too.

The money that is going out—you have money going to the stimulus payments, going to all of your citizens at $75,000. We put a hard cap. We tried it to put a hard cap at $75,000 and $150,000. We found out the first CARES package—I don't think that anyone on the Republican side or the Democrat side thought someone making $200,000, $300,000 would be getting money. They didn't need a check, but we found out it happened. We didn't intend for that to happen. That is the way the code read, and that is the way it kind of slipped into that. We stopped that from happening here.

So we tried to do everything—and that, again, came from our bipartisan group. If it wasn't for the bipartisan group talking and saying ''This is something we can't do,'' I would have had things I might have missed. I wouldn't have known some things that were of concern to all of us and some of the atrocities that happened that we didn't want to repeat. We did all the things we could to stop that.

I am very reluctant to object to any of my Senators, my fellow Senators, but on this one, sir—if I can work with you on this—I am objecting because I want to have a productive sit-down with you and we can work on something together.

Please tell your Governor that he can cut away if he wants to. He just can't go back to the Federal Government and say: OK, I made a mistake. Now I need your money.

That is about it in a nutshell. If Indiana can cut and it helps you and grows your economy, God bless you. If you have COVID expenses, we are going to help you. If you have projects—my goodness, just infrastructure projects—then there is no impediment there if you have internet services you need, if you have water services, and you have sewer services.

In West Virginia, what we are trying to do right now is put a team together that can basically work from this. The State has money for those three tranches of infrastructure. The counties have it, and the municipalities have it. The unincorporated towns that aren't able to get money directly are going to count on the county and the State.

There is so much good to be done to make it work for you to make sure they understand. They are elated to now have a project they never could finish, like upgrade your services, finish your water line, have internet service you have never had before. These are all unbelievable opportunities that we have never had.

The bipartisan SMART Act that was filed in May 2020 included both of these guardrails, plus another one required maintenance of effort. We have that in there. Maintenance of effort—we put that back then.

The Bipartisan State and Local Support of Small Business Protections Act that was released last December had exactly the same language. This is not new language, sir. This is the same language that has been there.

They have never been able to backfill for, basically, discretionary cuts that they made themselves. It doesn't prohibit them, the same as it doesn't prohibit anybody in their State for having—and being a former Governor, I am very partial to the 10th Amendment to the Constitution, States rights. You have those rights. Now you have the assistance also with those rights.

I am hoping to improve everyone's situation. I know it does in West Virginia. I hope it does in Maine. I hope it does in Indiana, and I think it will.

It is all about making these emergency funds get to the right people. We are trying to target it. It is something we have to keep an eye on. I can tell if we do it and do it right and we are good stewards, this will get us through this COVID challenge that we have because we really don't know.

I am hoping we come out of this guns ablazing in July—we come out of this, and the economy takes off like a rocket. Sometimes when they take off, they tend to level off too.

We want to make sure we are still out there for 2022, 2023, out to 2024. And if they do it and do it right, they can. They can finish their projects and be able to have the moneys as needed for emergencies if it has a dip.

With that, we thought we had worked something, but the language is nothing new. It is not a surprise. It was not anything that was put in; it has been in there. Basically, it is language that spells out pretty directly how you can use your money and what money you can't acquire. That is the only thing we did.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. MANCHIN. Yes, there is objection.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. BRAUN. My friend from West Virginia explained why this won't impact Governors and legislatures in terms of what they can do with their own fiscal policy. I would say my friend the Senator from West Virginia probably ought to check with Governor Justice and his legislature to see if they are on the same wavelength there.

When we got input in bringing this up as an issue and when you are talking about the American Legislative Exchange Council, Americans for Tax Reform, Citizens Against Government Waste—I won't repeat the rest of the list—I think it would get down to semantics in this sense: What do you do if you want to cut tax rates? Then, just like pre-COVID, we cut taxes, and revenues went up for 3 to 4 years.

How do you measure that complicated equation? In many cases, when you cut rates, you find a new sweet spot where you generate more tax revenue. How would you sort all of that out? Then, if it were not based upon penalizing States that are most apt to lower their tax rates because of how good their economies were pre-COVID, it would be a different issue as well.

So I am willing to listen in terms of how that does play out, but for now, I am going to view it as something, I think, that is not going to sit well with many States, their Governors, or their legislatures and that has a possibility of being taken to court as being something that might be unconstitutional. If I am off base, I am willing to listen, but I will probably have to bring some other parties in to make sure that this isn't a case of semantics and is real according to the way you explain it.

Mr. MANCHIN. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BRAUN. Yes, I will yield.

Mr. MANCHIN. First of all, I did have a nice conversation with Governor Justice. He and I have disagreed on basic issues on Tax Code legislation, and we are trying to work through all of that. I explained it to him. I said that it doesn't do a thing in that it doesn't impede you at all. If you want to cut, go ahead and cut. He is still moving through with the legislation. He might succeed on that, and he might not.

With that, I will make it very clear that this is not new language. You cannot backfill. You cannot backfill. The only thing you can use your money for is for COVID expenses. Basically, if your revenues were down through no fault of your own, business dropped off, and your tax collections were down through no fault of your own, then that is what this is for. COVID caused you a problem. It caused you an imposition and put strain on the services that you are basically providing to the people of West Virginia and Indiana.

We want to make sure that your first responders are there and your education is there, that everything is still running the way it is supposed to. That is why we have passed five bills in trying to keep things afloat, and we think we have done that. So it does not impede that whatsoever. We have also looked at it constitutionally, and we are solid on the Constitution.

All we are asking is, does the Federal Government have a responsibility to backfill with Treasury dollars a decision that could be self-inflicted? That is all. You should live with that or my State should live with it or reap the benefits. We are not penalized. Even if your revenues went up, you still had COVID expenses you could offset. Those were legitimate expenses that you incurred during the COVID–19 pandemic. The COVID–19 pandemic is what we are talking about. So if your revenues went up after that, we are not penalizing you. If they went down, that is a whole other story because COVID caused that, but you just can't cause it yourself. I think this is it in a nutshell.

Mr. BRAUN. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. MANCHIN. Yes, I will yield.

Mr. BRAUN. I think it begs the question in that, by cutting taxes, you are going to lower gross tax revenues, and that has been a discussion we have all had for many years.

I know in places like Indiana—and we just had it occur here with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act at the Federal level—that the CBO—and I was working with it—was getting close to saying its original forecast of when you had a tax cut, which was $1.5 trillion over 10 years, $150 billion per year, wasn't working out that way because there is the phenomenon called: When you find the sweet spot of taxation, you can cut taxes and generate more revenue. Then you penalize a good fiscal move by the way you are interpreting your reading.

I am willing to get into the nuance to see if that would muster that particular case, but I don't think it would.

Mr. MANCHIN. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BRAUN. Yes, I will yield.

Mr. MANCHIN. Senator BRAUN has always been very kind and very reasonable, and I look forward to sitting down with him on this.

What he has said is absolutely correct in that we are not penalizing. We don't intend to penalize anybody who has made that decision, but the Senator is talking about a State that has a balanced budget amendment year in and year out. There is a time when a Governor has to make a decision and go to his legislature and say: Hey, we are going to be X amount of dollars short, so we need to cut. So they start cutting and cutting services. That is what happens in order to balance the budget usually—services are cut to the people.

We are just saying in our piece of legislation here that we have that we don't want that to happen because it is of no fault of your own, but if you cut your taxes and you are thinking, well, 5 years down the road, we are going to have more revenue, then that is fine. You just can't backfill for that short period of time and use it for something for which you have cut revenues, basically, in a self-inflicting way. It might be a self-ingratiating way to where it will help you down the road, but you still can't backfill for that.

Now, for any COVID expenses you have, absolutely, you can fill that hole. Show that you have had COVID expenses. If you were to say, ''OK. We filled all of our holes for COVID, and now we have water, sewer, and internet''—and trust me, there is not a place in Indiana or in West Virginia that doesn't need help there.

I thank the Senator. I appreciate it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

(The remarks of Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 804 are printed in today's RECORD under ''Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.'')

Ms. COLLINS. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

PROTECT AND SERVE ACT

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I rise in support of the brave, hard-working men and women who serve as law enforcement officers in our communities across the Nation. Men and women in law enforcement risk life and limb every day to protect public safety and preserve the rule of law. They truly are American heroes.

In recognition of their remarkable service and sacrifice, I am reintroducing the Protect and Serve Act. I hope every Senator agrees we must do everything we can to support the men and women in blue. I also call on my colleagues to support this commonsense legislation. It is my hope that this legislation will unite us on a bipartisan basis to support those heroes who keep us safe.

I can think of no better example of why we need this legislation than the events of January 6, right here in this Chamber and across the Capitol. While a ruthless, anarchist mob sought to disrupt and destroy our democracy, Capitol Police officers bravely kept us safe from harm while they were being viciously attacked by the violent mob. Many of my colleagues saw this firsthand while they were getting us into a safe position as the events unfolded that day.

Because this attack occurred in DC, though, there are only limited laws in place to prosecute those who would assault a law enforcement officer. Under current law, a criminal who assaults a law enforcement officer with a deadly weapon or who inflicts bodily injury could receive anywhere from a fine to 20 years in prison. Under the Protect and Serve Act, these violent criminals will receive an additional 10 years in prison if they assault an officer, and if they murder or kidnap a law enforcement officer, they could be given life sentences.

This would apply not only to Federal law enforcement and Federal properties, but it could also be used to prosecute criminals at the State and local levels who target law enforcement officers. This Federal law would ensure

that prosecutors have every tool available to punish those who attack the men and women in blue.

Nationwide in 2020, 47 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty, and over 300 were shot. Three of those murdered officers were right in my home State of North Carolina. So far in 2021, 14 officers have been killed in the line of duty, and over 50 have been shot. Countless others have been assaulted.

The year 2020 saw the rise of radical ideas like abolishing the police, which fueled distrust and disdain for our brave men and women in blue. Even while Americans of all views are calling for transparency and accountability, the ideas of abolishing and defunding the police only serve to deepen the divide in our country and our communities.

It is sad that Congress even needs to consider a bill to protect law enforcement officers. The heated rhetoric and the violent attacks on officers are having real world impacts beyond just the safety of our law enforcement community. Across the country, recruitments are down and retirements are up. We have cities having to increase funding for recruiting and finding people that will replace those who have left the profession or retired early. This is sad, but it is not surprising. Law enforcement officers put their lives at risk every single day. They leave their spouses and families every morning, and they don't know if they are going to come back.

In 2018, before the antipolice rhetoric took hold, the House passed the legislation by an overwhelming vote of 382 to 35—the bill that I am reintroducing—including 220 Republicans and 162 Democrats. On the floor, every current Member of the House Democratic leadership voted in favor of this legislation, including Speaker PELOSI.

This has been bipartisan legislation, and it should be bipartisan legislation today, which is why I call on all of my colleagues—Members of the Republican caucus and the Democratic caucus—to join us in support of this commonsense and needed legislation.

Congress must pass the Protect and Serve Act right away and boldly say that there is no escape from justice for dangerous criminals who intentionally assault and kill our hard-working, dedicated law enforcement officers.

I urge the American people: Call your Senators. Ask them to support the measure. Tell them that you want this bill passed and our law enforcement officers protected. Don't be silent. Help me fight for the men and women in blue, because they are counting on us. And along the way, when you see a law enforcement officer, thank them for their service and let them know Members of Congress are fighting for them.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, last month, the American people created 379,000 new jobs across our country. The unemployment rate fell to 6.2 percent. Our economy is recovering. We are actually on our way back to normal.

In early February, the Congressional Budget Office published a report on this. The report says that our economy will reach the same size that it was before the pandemic, and it will do it in just a few months. It says this summer our economy will be back to normal.

Now, the CBO made that projection weeks before the Democrats passed and the President signed into law a $1.9 trillion wish list. In other words, our economy would be back to normal even had they never passed the bill. We would be back to normal without a dime of this incredible high amount of spending.

We didn't need the liberal wish list. The country doesn't need it. Yet it is obvious why Democrats rushed—rushed—their liberal wish list into law. They wanted to stamp their name on the recovery that was coming, no matter what. I have no doubt that that is the goal.

Yet the truth is clear: This is not President Biden's recovery. President Biden inherited three vaccines—successful vaccines, vaccines that work and are safe. President Biden inherited 2 million tests a day for coronavirus. President Biden inherited falling coronavirus numbers. He also inherited a recovering economy.

Last year, we saw the fastest economic recovery in American history. The unemployment rate fell by half in 6 months. The American people created more than 12 million jobs coming back from the pandemic. They did it in just 6 months. That is more jobs than were created in the 8 years of the Obama-Biden administration.

Now, this was in large part because of the foundation laid by Republicans before the pandemic, with President Trump's economic programs in the White House. Republicans cut taxes for the middle class, on job creators. We cut regulations, and we cut government redtape. We made a better trade deal with our neighbors. Our agenda worked.

Just before the pandemic hit, the unemployment rate was down to 3.6 percent. The American people created more than 7 million new jobs under President Trump. We saw record-low unemployment for Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans. We reached the lowest unemployment rate for women in 60 years.

When America began to reopen, the success of that agenda helped us recover at a record pace. The economy is also recovering because we are making progress against the virus.

With Republicans in the White House and a Republican majority in the U.S. Senate, we passed more than $4 trillion in coronavirus relief. Unlike the Democrats' relief wish list, all five of our bills were bipartisan. They each got 90 votes in the Senate or more.

Operation Warp Speed broke records for vaccine development. A new vaccine typically takes about 10 years from the lab to people's arms. The previous record for a vaccine was for mumps. It took 4 years. Last year, we achieved two coronavirus vaccines in 10 months. We broke records, and it wasn't even close. The Food and Drug Administration made dozens of cuts to regulations in order to make this happen.

The Biden administration has not played it straight with the American people about coronavirus. We remember when Vice President Harris said that there was ''no national strategy or plan for vaccinations.''

We were delivering millions of doses of vaccines in December. President Biden said: ''We got into office and there was nothing in the refrigerator''—''nothing in the refrigerator.''

The Biden campaign and now the Biden administration has repeatedly misled the American people on the coronavirus. They have repeatedly taken credit for things for which they deserve no credit.

Mark my words. This summer they are going to try to take credit for our recovery. If they do, they will be flat-out wrong.

Our recovery was booming under the Republican agenda, and it was an agenda of low taxes and fewer regulations. That is the agenda that the American people need to get our economy booming again.

DEMOCRATS' AGENDA

Madam President, on another matter, I also come to the floor to oppose what I see as a radical agenda of the Democrats in Congress.

It has not even been 2 months since the Democrats took over the Senate, and they have already rolled out one of the most leftwing agendas in American history. They have already spent $1.9 trillion—trillion with a ''t''—$1.9 trillion of our tax dollars. Twenty-six Democrats have endorsed amnesty for illegal immigrants. Nearly every Democrat has endorsed giving statehood to Washington, DC, and now Senator SCHUMER has put gun control on the Senate's to-do list. Democrats have proposed a radical agenda that invades nearly every aspect of American life.

Yet the driving force behind this agenda is not the Senate. It is still the House. House Democrats have gone after our First Amendment right to freedom of religion. They have gone after our Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms. They have gone after our right to work. When Democrats are in charge, none of our rights are safe.

Neither are our most cherished institutions. House Democrats have gone after our police, gone after our elections. They lecture Republicans about accepting the results of elections. Yet they are trying to overturn an election in Iowa.

Now, the lawyer the Democrats have put in charge of that case was just

sanctioned in Federal court on ethics violations. Yet Speaker PELOSI has made it clear at her press conference on Friday that she supports the effort to overturn the election.

That is not all. Democrats aren't just trying to change one election. They are trying to change all of our elections. They have passed a bill to change just about every aspect of our elections forever.

A recent poll by Harvard shows that 71 percent of voters say they don't want future elections to be like they were in 2020. If Democrats get their way, every election will be a pandemic election.

To change our elections, Democrats still need 60 votes in the Senate. That is why over the weekend, Democrats' allies at the New York Times endorsed changing the rules of the Senate. The paper explicitly said that that was the reason. The paper attacked Members of this body—Senator MANCHIN and Senator SINEMA—who have had the courage to oppose changing the rules of the Senate. The editorial board said: ''This is a singular moment for American democracy, if Democrats are willing to seize it.''

It is dangerous. It is scary. Yet it is true. This is a singular moment. Once they rig the Senate, then they can rig our elections. Once they rig our elections, then there will be nothing to stop them. Then they can go after our religious freedoms. They can go after our rights to keep and bear arms. And they can spend as many of our hard-earned tax dollars as they want.

This certainly is a singular moment for our democracy. It is a moment for Senators on both sides of the aisle to stand up to this radical agenda.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

MARCH MADNESS

Mr. YOUNG. Madam President, I rise today to speak about a subject that is a point of pride and a source of passion for my constituents.

Visit Indiana, and you are bound to see them: a backboard hammered to an old barn, rows of asphalt courts in city parks, a lone hoop in front of a cornfield or in a clearing, steel poles standing in driveways.

Though basketball wasn't technically invented in Indiana, Indiana is indeed its epicenter. Even the game's inventor, James Naismith, once said: ''Basketball really had its origin in Indiana, which remains the center of the sport.''

So it is appropriate that this year's NCAA tournament will be played in its entirety in our State.

Now this, of course, is in part because planning and hosting 68 teams in the middle of a global pandemic presents unprecedented challenges, challenges that Hoosiers in and around Indianapolis are going to be able to navigate. And they will be able to work their world-class college campuses in order to host teams from around the country. It is a great source of pride for us.

But it is also fitting because this sport is so important to our State. You see, it is March Madness meets Hoosier Hysteria. The gyms where we play basketball are historic sites. The men and women who have competed and coached back home are Indiana folk heroes. We know their names. They are part of our common language: The Big O, Catch, the General, Bird, Wooden.

Memorabilia, artifacts, and sites associated with them are preserved in museums and townhalls. They are in school gyms. They are marked by bronze plaques and other ways to memorialize those who have preceded us. Streets and roads are named in their honor. We can even identify legendary teams and major moments in our basketball history with just a few almost mythic words that are familiar to the ears of Hoosiers: ''Franklin Wonder Five,'' ''Plump's last shot,'' ''8 points in 9 seconds,'' and, yes, the infamous ''chair throw.''

Even the color of the ball—orange, of course—can be traced back to a Hoosier, Tony Hinkle, who thought it was a good idea.

For Indiana, basketball is much more than just a pastime. It is a source of joy. It is a source of joy for our communities, and it brings the people in and across them together. After all, it takes little more than a basket and a ball to play.

That is why wherever you go in Indiana and no matter the neighborhood you might be visiting or passing by, be it affluent or hit by hard times, in the country or in the city, you are going to see basketball played. It almost doesn't matter what the time of year it is or what the weather is like, you are likely to see basketball if you hit the road for a few hours in Indiana at any given time of year. You are going to hear it discussed. The basketball court and the gymnasium bleachers are great levelers.

I am sharing this with you because there is a larger point at play. Today, it increasingly seems that Americans have less and less in common with one another; that we are defining ourselves not as a diverse nation united by a common set of values with a shared past and a shared future, but we are instead sorting ourselves into tribes based on geography or class or even political affiliation. This has been accompanied by the hollowing out of many of our communities and a loss of faith in the public spaces and access to these public spaces and institutions that shape our national identity and bind this vast, pluralistic, and beautiful country together.

Now, these are dangerous trends, this separation, this tribalism; ones that we are going to have to work hard to turn back. There is only so much this body can do—I am under no illusions—there is only so much government can do to make America whole again.

That is why we should cherish and celebrate the institutions that do have the power to unite us. And, as any Hoosier will tell you, basketball is one of them.

Even beyond this, as its history in Indiana shows, this shared ritual that brings us joy and brings us together also pushes us to be better individually and collectively.

I think of the persistence of a teenager by the name of Steve Alford, endlessly practicing free throws in his driveway in New Castle, even in the snow and rain; and the courage of Indiana University's Bill Garrett, who fought segregation and broke the Big Ten color barrier; and then the faith of Little Milan High, enrollment hardly 100, beating mighty Muncie Central, enrollment over 1,000, for the 1954 State high school championship; the grace of successive generations of graduates at Crispus Attucks. Now, this is a high school built to segregate Black students in Indianapolis, but it then grew into an academic and athletic powerhouse whose basketball program was a beacon in the civil rights movement and, to this day, remains a great source of pride not just for Black Hoosiers but for all Hoosiers. It was also the first African-American team to win a State championship in the Nation; the spirit of the tiny town of Medora, an underdog community featured in a recent documentary, who stood by their team while its players laced up work boots because they couldn't afford basketball shoes. Then they set out with grit and determination and resolve to end a season losing streak.

So these scenes from Indiana's history, up to the present day, like the game itself, unite people from different backgrounds, and they foster pride in our places, especially our struggling places. They teach us to draw a line between competition and contempt, to keep perspective and to have the humility to remember that defeat is never permanent and neither is victory. They help us see and treasure what we have in common. They show us the power of opportunity and empowerment.

Institutions like basketball can't be taken for granted. They bring meaning and purpose into the lives of people and places that we call home. They encourage our citizens to dream beyond limit, and I would say that they are what we need in this Nation right now.

So as the NCAA tournament tips off and the games begin across our stadiums, field houses, and arenas, Indiana's hardwood civic temples, as we like to think of them, I know will be a reflection for our love for basketball and an exhibition of our collaborative ability to host such a large event during such a difficult time.

But what will also be on display is the other reason it is right and proper that this event takes place in Indiana. We are devoted to this sport because it brings us hope, and it brings us together. It instills the virtues necessary to preserve many of the other features that make our country so special. It really can help make America whole again.

Now and then, we all need to be gently reminded, I think, of the importance of these very things, and I can think of no better time or place for that than March in Indiana.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, let me thank my colleague from Indiana. You can't do better than ''Hoosiers.'' It is one of my favorite movies. It is the story of a small Indiana town beating the big city players, and, if I am not mistaken, my former colleague in the House, Lee Hamilton, might have been one of those players on the big city team. I think he told me at one point. It is a great story and all eyes are on Indianapolis and Indiana now with the NCAA tournament and your neighbors to the west, Illinois, headed across the border. It is going to make a good showing, I hope, for the Fighting Illini.

Thank you very much for reminding us of that great American tradition.

SENATE FILIBUSTER RULE

Madam President, earlier in the day, my friend and colleague from Texas, Senator CORNYN, came to the floor and raised some questions about my commitment to the filibuster as a rule in the Senate. He quoted me several years ago as saying the filibuster is kind of an indication of what the Senate was all about, and I still stand by that.

The Senate, of course, with two Senators from each State, regardless of their population, is an opportunity for smaller States and minorities to be represented and to have a voice. And the filibuster, at least in some respects, was a procedural reflection of that same value.

But I would say to Senator CORNYN, I have been moved and changed my mind somewhat on filibuster because of nothing—nothing. That is what has been happening on the floor of the U.S. Senate, nothing. When Senator MCCONNELL, as the Republican leader, was in charge of the Senate over the last 2 years, we did little or nothing.

I didn't run for this office to represent the people of Illinois and to help our Nation to watch the ink dry on documents that are being pushed back and forth on desks here. We came here to do something.

Two years ago, because of the filibuster, 2 years ago, we considered 22 amendments in the course of 1 year on the floor of the Senate. That is not counting vote-arama, that contraption of a procedure where we debate all of 2 minutes before we vote on something, but real debate and real amendments—22.

Well, the following year, 2020, dramatic increase. We went all the way up to 29 amendments in the course of a year.

You say: Well, give me some measurement in history. My wife said: What does that mean? In the first year of the Obama administration, we had 240 amendments in the first year. Now we are down to 22 and 29. Why? Because we reached a point now where everyone assumes that every issue is going to be filibustered, and therefore if you don't have 60 votes, forget it.

Well, it is rare that that kind of supermajority shows up on anything important.

That is what happens when you play out the filibuster tradition to an extreme. As one staffer said to me the other day, the Senate is in a death spiral. No one can bring anything to the floor that might be subject to a filibuster because you can't imagine where you are going to get 60 votes.

I hope he is wrong, but I can understand his analysis. The measures that we have considered so far this year in the U.S. Senate, after 2 months-plus—well, the impeachment trial—that didn't require any filibuster votes. The nominations that come before us every day are not subject to a filibuster. And, of course, there is the reconciliation bill—the American rescue program for President Biden—that was under a procedure where you couldn't use a filibuster.

So now things are quiet on the floor of the Senate again this week and next week because whatever you bring here is subject to a threat of a filibuster, and you need 60 votes. I have watched this play out on an issue near and dear to my heart. It is called the DREAM Act, which I introduced 20 years ago—20 years ago. It basically says that if you were brought to this country as an infant, toddler, or a child—your parents made the decision—you grow up here and you ought to have a fighting chance to earn your way to legal status and citizenship. That is it.

Overwhelming majorities of people in all political parties support it. They think it is a good idea. And you say: DURBIN, you came here to be a legislator, and, in 20 years, you can't pass one bill?

Well, I tried. Five times I brought the DREAM Act to the floor of the U.S. Senate, and it was stopped with a filibuster each and every time. I got a majority, and I still have a majority in support of it, but I can't get that 60 votes—that magic 60 votes that is needed under a filibuster.

Well, I am frustrated by that, and I hope my frustration is manifest by what I said on the floor. My challenge to the Members of the Senate on both sides of the aisle is very simply this: If you believe in the filibuster and if you believe in working, show me that you can pass an important bill subject to the filibuster. Do it next week or the week following. Bring something to the floor. Let's debate it, let's amend, and let's vote it. I don't think that is unreasonable to ask. In fact, I think that is the reason we were elected to come here.

So I would say to the defenders of the filibuster: Try to defend what has happened on the floor of the Senate the last 2 years—almost nothing. We can do better. The American people expect it of us.

GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Madam President, last night, near Atlanta, GA, a gunman murdered eight people in what appears to be an act of domestic terrorism. Six of the eight victims were women of Asian descent. We mourn the lives of those lost and pray for the families and loved ones.

While local and Federal authorities are still investigating the gunman's motives, we know that in the past year it has been a perilous time for Asian Americans and those from the Pacific Islands, especially women.

Since the pandemic began last March, nearly 3,800 hate incidents targeting these Americans have been reported. I expect the number of unreported incidents is much higher.

Asian-American women have had racist insults shouted at them from across streets. Grandparents have been assaulted and killed while running errands. Some Asian Americans have even begun carrying pepper spray, wearing body cameras, and walking in groups to protect themselves from wanton violence. Increasingly, AAPI Americans do not feel safe in their own neighborhoods.

This palpable fear is proof of how dangerous racist stereotypes and demagoguery can be. When former President Trump insists on calling the coronavirus the ''China virus,'' as he did again last night on FOX News, he is not simply spouting hateful, childish rhetoric. He is granting people permission. Permission to target neighbors and fellow citizens. Permission to hate.

This kind of language divides and preys on fears. It offers the kind of answer to every problem that you might expect from these people. There is always somebody you could fear and someone you can hate. The sad reality is that racist fear-mongering has always been part of the American story.

Today, we know, by testimony from the FBI Director, that it is a growing danger to every American. Intelligence analysts warn us that White supremacists and other far-right extremists are the most significant domestic terrorism threat facing the United States. Of course, we look across the ocean to the threat of terrorism after 9/11. Sadly, now we have to look across the street.

For far too long the Federal Government has failed to adequately address this growing threat. We saw the lethal results of that inattention on January 6, right here in this Senate Chamber. Groups of far-right nationalists and neo-Nazis, provoked by former President Trump, stormed our Capitol in an attempted insurrection.

I have introduced a bipartisan bill in the Senate that would give law enforcement the resources to address this threat. It is called the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act. It would establish offices to combat domestic terrorism in the Department of Justice, the FBI, and the Department of Homeland Security. Those offices would assess the domestic terrorism threat regularly so that law enforcement can focus their limited resources on the most significant threats, like those facing AAPI Americans today.

My bill would also provide training and resources to assist State, local, and Tribal law enforcement in addressing those threats. I am sure communities across this Nation could use that support.

And there is the issue of how these terrorist acts are committed. Last night's attack near Atlanta was a mass shooting, a uniquely American threat. Next week, the Senate Judiciary Committee, which I chair, will hold a hearing on gun violence in America. Too many people get shot in America—not just near Atlanta but in the cities of Chicago and St. Louis and all across our country. How many times have we seen images in those communities like we did last night of another mass shooting? America is better than this.

We need to take action to reduce the number of gun deaths in this Nation. We are going to get to work in the Senate Judiciary Committee to try to find some common, bipartisan ground to address it. Maybe we will fail. I hope we succeed. We have to try.

It is time for the Senate to stop cowering before any special interest group and pass commonsense gun safety policy. To the people of Atlanta, to members of the AAPI community, and all across America, we are standing with you. We are grieving with you. We will do everything in our power to protect you.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Madam President, our Nation is at a critical moment in our fight against COVID–19. We have seen declining infections, declining hospitalizations and deaths. And thanks to three effective vaccines—and, perhaps, more on the way—and adherence to social distancing and mask wearing, this new administration has put together a comprehensive plan to address and defeat this virus, but we aren't out of the woods yet.

In the United States, we have less than 5 percent of the world's population and 20 percent of the COVID cases and deaths. We can continue to see 50,000 to 60,000 new COVID cases every day. We still have approximately 4,700 people hospitalized because of COVID in the United States. We still tragically lose 1,200 American lives each day.

While access is improving greatly, we still see too many people struggling to get a vaccine. If we are going to defeat this virus once and for all, we need our top public health officials in place on the job.

Yet our Republican colleagues continue to block the nomination of Xavier Becerra to head the Department of Health and Human Services, the chief Federal Agency responsible for our public health response to COVID. Their campaign to leave the top public health position in this Nation empty in the midst of a pandemic is unwise. It has to come to an end.

It has been 3 months—3 months—since President Biden announced that he would nominate Mr. Becerra to serve as Secretary of Health and Human Services. A majority of Senators support his nomination. I do. He is a personal friend and someone I have known for years. He is extremely competent and ready for the job.

Yet Republican Senators continue to delay Xavier Becerra's nomination day after day after day. Their objections to him are all over the map. They say they oppose him because of his support for the Affordable Care Act. Remember that one—President Obama's Affordable Care Act, which took half of the people who were uninsured in America and gave them the protection of health insurance, maybe for the first time in their lives. It provided health coverage to more than 20 million Americans. It has been a lifeline to families nationwide.

Most people would say: Thank goodness Mr. Becerra supported it. For a man who wants to be Secretary of HHS, you would almost insist on that. And yet Republicans oppose his nomination because of that, and they also don't like the fact that he was the attorney general of California and he enforced the State's COVID–19 rules. How can defending public health rules disqualify a person who wants to be America's top public health official?

We are in the midst of a lethal pandemic that has claimed nearly 530,000 American lives. More people are infected and dying every day. Is this any time to play politics with the Department of Health and Human Services? I don't think so.

Xavier Becerra is an effective manager, a smart, thoughtful, passionate leader. He is the right person to lead the Department. He served in the U.S. House of Representatives for more than two decades. As California's top prosecutor in 2017, he took on the tobacco companies and the opioid manufacturers—three cheers for him in both instances—and he helped defend healthcare for families, women, and the LGBTQ community.

In his confirmation hearing, Mr. Becerra highlighted his commitment to serving all Americans by expanding access to health insurance, lowering prescription drug prices, improving rural healthcare, and addressing racial and ethnic disparities in care. Would you expect anything less from a man who wants to lead our public health effort?

When he is finally confirmed this week, after this unconscionable delay—and he will be confirmed—he will be the first Latino to serve as Secretary of HHS. His historic confirmation will be especially meaningful at this moment in time when Latinos are disproportionately affected by the medical and economic impact of COVID.

Delaying his confirmation only hurts our Nation—still struggling to beat this pandemic; still working to get everyone vaccinated, to get our schools open, and everybody back to work. Sadly, these Republican Senators who have led this charge against him are demonstrating obstructionism at its worst and at the worst moment.

I look forward to confirming Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. While my colleague Senator DURBIN is here, there is a real irony here to say that our Republican friends are not going to support Xavier Becerra because of his support of the Affordable Care Act. One key ingredient of the Affordable Care Act is actually the exchanges to provide for those who don't have access to coverage from their employer or some other way to get in a group.

But that was an idea that was introduced in 1993 by 23 Republican Senators—23 Republican Senators—as an alternative to HillaryCare, and it never got anywhere. It never went anywhere until an enterprising Governor from Massachusetts—I heard about him—said: Here is a way one can enforce this and provide opportunities for the people to get healthcare coverage that otherwise wouldn't have it. He said this might work. And they introduced it as RomneyCare in the State of Massachusetts. And do you know what? It worked. It made healthcare coverage available to a lot of people, and it helped on the affordability side too.

For our Republican friends to say that is the reason why—his support for the ACA, a key ingredient of which is the exchange—is an irony here. So I hope it is not lost on our friends.

I thank Senator DURBIN for those comments.

Like my friend Senator DURBIN, I, too, rise in support of Attorney General Xavier Becerra, a longtime public servant and President Biden's nominee to be our next Secretary of Health and Human Service.

For a year now, I have been saying to anybody who would listen that the only way to really get our economy back on track, to put parents back to work, kids back in the classroom, and life back to normal in the United States of America is to do all that we can to put this devastating pandemic in our Nation's rearview mirror. That means vaccinating as many at-risk Americans as safely and as quickly as possible.

In fact, under the leadership of our new President, America is leading the way in the production and the distribution of vaccines. How about that—leading the world?

Each day we are breaking records on the number of new Americans who are being vaccinated. After going through one of the darkest periods in American history, we are finally beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But as we ramp up for actual distribution throughout America and help make sure that all people—all people from rural communities to urban cities—have equitable access to lifesaving vaccines, we need to make sure that the

Department of Health and Human Services has the right leader at the helm going forward. And for my money and my judgment, that leader is Xavier Becerra. I believe he is the right person for this job at this point in our Nation's history.

As a key member of the Biden administration, he will work with the White House. He will work with us in the Congress to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and to coordinate our Nation's response to it.

Just as he has done throughout his career, he will fight to expand affordable healthcare, address persistent health disparities, and restore HHS's mission to protect the health and well-being of all Americans.

Madam President, I have heard several of my Republican colleagues calling into question Xavier Becerra's—Attorney General Becerra's qualifications to serve as HHS Secretary. Obviously they are free to express their concerns. As Senators, it is our duty to vet and evaluate Cabinet nominees and make sure that we believe they are going to be best able to serve the American people. I take the responsibility seriously. I know our Presiding Officer does as well. But let me set the record straight, if I could, on Xavier Becerra. I am confident that with his decades of experience working on healthcare issues in Congress and as California's attorney general, he will be an invaluable part of President Biden's administration as we work together to combat the pandemic nationally.

Some of the critics on the other side of the aisle say: What does he know about healthcare? Well, as it turns out, he served for I want to say two decades on the House Committee on Ways and Means. The last time I checked—you may want to double-check me on this—I think the primary responsibility of that committee is Medicare, and for somebody who served that long on that committee, I bet he knows a thing or two about Medicare. As it turns out, he does.

Throughout his career in public service, Xavier Becerra has shown an unwavering commitment to protecting and expanding healthcare availability for millions of American families and workers, especially those in vulnerable communities who remain underserved.

In the House of Representatives, he was a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee, which helped to make the Affordable Care Act, which is based on a Republican idea, I think out of the Heritage Foundation in 1993 that, as I mentioned earlier, MITT ROMNEY helped make a household word in the State of Massachusetts when he was Governor there. And I think half of the people who had healthcare coverage—who didn't have it when we created the ACA have it. They have it today. We cut in half the number of people who don't have access to healthcare coverage.

In the State of Delaware, the cost of coverage is actually dropping in the exchanges. It has dropped by I think 19 percent over the last 2 years alone, as market forces are taking place and taking hold.

As attorney general of California, as has been mentioned, he led the charge for a coalition of States to defend the Affordable Care Act against multiple attempts by the Trump administration to dismantle this landmark legislation altogether.

I once asked somebody—I asked him. I said: What is it about your experience that would suggest you could run a big operation like the Department of Health and Human Services?

He said: Well, I have run the Department of Justice in California. It is the second largest Department of Justice in the country, second only to the Federal Department of Justice.

I forget how many thousands—maybe tens of thousands—of employees they have, but it is a huge operation in a huge State with a ton of people.

Xavier Becerra brought together attorneys general from both sides of the aisle to hold opioid manufacturers accountable for the addiction crisis that we are still struggling with.

When the pandemic hit, he went to bat for Californians on everything from protections for our workers from exposure to COVID–19, increasing transparency in nursing homes, to securing key safeguards for the rights of frontline healthcare personnel.

His past leadership is a major reason why President Biden is asking him today to accept the responsibilities of overseeing responses to many of our Nation's most urgent needs, including the distribution of COVID–19 vaccinations, restoring the public confidence in vital public health institutions, and boosting family health and financial security in the wake of the pandemic.

With so much of the COVID–19 response being executed at the State and local levels, we are fortunate that President Biden has chosen as his HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra, a leader with relevant, on-the-ground, State-based experience.

As a former State treasurer, former Governor, former chairman of the National Governors Association, to have somebody with this kind of State-based experience, what a blessing that would be.

As the head of the largest State department of justice in the Nation, overseeing thousands of employees, Attorney General Becerra has a proven track record and the management experience necessary to take on the massive operations at HHS. He will also make, as Senator DURBIN has mentioned, history as the first Latino American to take on this role, providing important perspective as Latinos and other minority communities continue to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

As we try to make sure that about a third of the American people who are saying they are not going to take the vaccine—they don't care; they are going to take a chance—and a lot of those people are Latino—wouldn't it be nice to have a Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services who could reach out to that community, literally reach out to them and touch them and convince them that, no, this is something they should do; they should take this chance and be glad they did.

Four years ago, this body confirmed President Trump's nominee for Health and Human Services within just 20 days—20 days from the start of his administration. We knew then that this role was important to fill. It took us 20 days.

Now, in the midst of a deadly pandemic, one that has taken the lives of over 530,000 Americans—a toll that exceeds the number of American deaths on the battlefields of World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam war, in which I served—we cannot afford to let another day go by without confirming Xavier Becerra.

With all of that, I just want to say, colleagues, it is time. It is over time, and we need to confirm Xavier. I think—in fact, I am convinced he will do a good job. He will make us proud. We need him. The President needs him. And with him on board as the leader of HHS, he can go to work on behalf of the American people and put this pandemic behind us for good, and we need that day to come soon.

I don't see anybody else waiting to speak. I think maybe I should suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NO HATE ACT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Madam President, we are working today in the shadow of a truly hideous, horrific series of murders that occurred yesterday in Atlanta, GA, and I want to start by expressing my sympathies to the families that are affected, families of innocent women who were gunned down heinously by a murderer there. Eight lives were taken by that gunman, six of them Asian women.

There is an active, ongoing investigation, and I have no intention of prejudging the outcome. Justice must be done, and I have confidence in the law enforcement authorities of Atlanta that they will assure that justice is done.

So we don't know for sure what the gunman's motivation was, but we know eight of the women were Asian, and we know for sure that this horrific shooting rampage is only the latest egregious incident in a sickening, despicable trend of anti-Asian-American, or AAPI, violence that has terrorized the Asian-American community over recent months.

And we know many of these incidents were, in fact, hate crimes motivated by

bias, bigotry, and prejudice. Now, hate-motivated violence, as Attorney Garland said at his confirmation hearing, ''tear[s] at the fabric of our society . . . make[s] our citizens worried about walking [on] the streets and exercising even the most normal rights.''

And he is absolutely correct. It tears at our society. It degrades our trust in each other and in the fairness of America and the survivability of values and rights that are central to our democracy.

The increase in violence against Asian Americans must end, and we all know it. We all say it, but we must do it. In Congress, we must do everything in our power to provide law enforcement and prosecutors with the resources and the tools they need to overcome it, to successfully fight it, which they can do. And they need the will and determination to wield the tools and resources that we give them because they have to not only investigate, as they will this gunman, but also to effectively prosecute and assure just punishment.

We don't know for sure the motivation. We have evidence. And we can't say for sure how many hate crimes there have been against Asian Americans or others in our great country, but we have a pretty good idea where it all came from.

The rise in anti-Asian-American violence started with the previous administration, who failed to address and manage the COVID–19 pandemic, and rather than listen to the scientists and work to stop its spread, it sought to scapegoat a part of our country. It sought to scapegoat Asian Americans with xenophobic and hate-filled rhetoric.

Words have consequences. We all say it. We all know it. And we must denounce the words that spur and spew hatred and cause or contribute to hate crimes. Hate crimes are a growing scourge. The numbers are surging, whether it is against Asian Americans, Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans, Black Americans. When it is against Americans, it is against America. Words do have consequences.

Stop AAPI Hate, which tracks violence and harassment against the AAPI community, Asian Americans, received more than 1,100 reports of COVID-related harassment, discrimination, and assault in its first two operational weeks last March. And now it has recorded more than 3,800 incidents since the start of the pandemic—3,800 incidents of harassment, discrimination, and sometimes physical assault—spurred and encouraged and condoned by public officials who used that hate-filled rhetoric to cover their own failures in dealing with the pandemic.

As the investigators and prosecutors go forward, we will learn more, and we need to let them do their jobs. But that doesn't mean we should remain silent, nor does it give us an excuse to be inert. We need to denounce that kind of rhetoric. We need to take action.

I have proposed a measure called the NO HATE Act, which would provide more training for investigators and more resources for hotlines because these hate crimes are typically and repeatedly unreported, and it would provide more incentives for reporting and new penalties—or encourage the imposition of penalties—that truly fit the crime.

Hate crimes are corrosive to our social fabric. They corrupt the pillars of our society, and their effect is unmistakable.

They traumatize and terrorize the communities that are their targets—in this case, Asian Americans, who have become more and more fearful as these incidents have multiplied. We all have a part to do in stopping this scourge. And we know that it is rampant, in part, because of the White supremacists and domestic terrorism and violent extremism that showed its ugly face in this Chamber earlier this year. It showed its brutal, cruel force in this building.

It is the same virus and cancer that is metastasizing in this country today. And its visible forms are the assaults, harassment, and discrimination that may well have been reflected in those murders yesterday.

I hope the NO HATE Act passes, but it won't be for a while. I hope we can take other action, but it will take time. And in the meantime, we can all take it as a moral imperative as our duty to denounce—not condoned by our silence—these groups and their extremist ideologies in White supremacists that perpetuate and expand the virus and cancer of hate crimes and hatred. Hate speech—fighting words—incitement in our society.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Now, a bright spot for America today is the confirmation, which we hope will happen in the next 24 hours, of the first Latino Secretary of Health and Human Services in America, the first. He was the first in his working-class family to go to college. He broke barriers throughout his career.

Xavier Becerra, presently the attorney general of California, will be a leader of toughness, bravery, and vision at the Department of Health and Human Services.

I stand here as a former attorney general, actually, for 20 years. I know well how much of that job is spent on healthcare policy, and I know also the management skills it takes to achieve real concrete results.

Attorney General Becerra is deeply qualified because of his work as State attorney general, but he also enjoys a wealth of other experience, both personal and professional, that make him exactly the right person at this moment for that job. He knows the importance of healthcare—equitable healthcare, reducing the disparities in healthcare in our country that afflict us now.

We have been in a healthcare crisis for more than a year, the deepest, most painful healthcare crisis in our lives and maybe for a full century, a time of heartbreak and hardship, when a deadly, insidious virus has threatened economic upheaval and disaster. It is a pandemic that has left no family untouched, as all of us in this Chamber know, and no community unscathed.

We have lost more than half a million of our fellow citizens and people to COVID–19, including 7,800-plus in Connecticut. While there is light at the end of the tunnel, each day brings a new loss. And we don't know how long that tunnel may be.

The Biden administration has been laser-focused on ending this pandemic since day one. Every day, more and more Americans are receiving the vaccine. Every day, more and more Americans are beginning to see the big, bold benefits of the American Rescue Plan that President Biden signed last week, and every day we are seeing strong leadership from the Biden administration in addressing this deep crisis.

While there is hope at this moment, there are immense healthcare challenges still to be overcome, from increasing healthcare affordability and reducing the uninsured rate to lowering drug costs, to fighting back against healthcare disparities and protecting reproductive rights, and, I would repeat, lowering prescription drug costs. Job No. 1 for America, lowering prescription drug costs. Job No. 2, lowering prescription drug costs. We need to reduce the prices of medicine that Americans need every day, aside from the pandemic, every day. Prescription drug prices plague them, cause them worry, force them to make tough choices between eating and using the medicine, paying their rent, and buying the drugs they need to survive.

Attorney General Becerra served as deputy attorney general in California and later as a member of the State assembly before he went to the House of Representatives, here in the Capitol, for more than two decades. As a Congressman—and I think this point is really important—then-Representative Xavier Becerra fought to pass the Affordable Care Act, and then he fought to defend it against the Trump administration.

As California's attorney general, he was a warrior in fighting to preserve the ACA, and he will continue to fight for the men and women who depend on the ACA. And more and more of them, fortunately, are taking advantage of it because of the American Rescue Plan.

He is also a leader in taking on Big Tobacco. I sued the tobacco companies, helped to lead a multi-State attorney general group, and I know it takes courage to stand up and speak out and act against Big Tobacco. And he has done more. He has taken that fight to a new frontier. He is committed to protecting our children from the scourge of flavored tobacco and the insidious products—often they are flavored too—that are sold by vaping giants, which now include some tobacco companies.

Attorney General Becerra is a leader in protecting reproductive rights. He is a leader in expanding mental healthcare services. He is a leader in the fight against the opioid epidemic. He is a leader for LGBTQ health and for ending the disparities.

We are in a racial justice movement now, a racial justice movement that is seeking to end those deep disparities, causing twice as many people in communities of color to die during the pandemic and only half as many now to have the vaccine so far because we have lived through 4 years of dishonesty and disregard for science and 4 years of attacks on our healthcare system, particularly for the underserved.

That is the challenge, among others, that Attorney General Becerra will confront. He will be vigorous, brave, and tough, and he will work to lower the cost of prescription drugs. He will take on those interests that may be against the healthcare goals and purposes of the American people. And we need him now more than ever in this critical position. I urge my colleagues to vote for him tomorrow when we have the chance to do so.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from California.

GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I want to begin by joining with so many of our colleagues and leaders around the country expressing our condolences to the victims of the senseless shootings in Atlanta yesterday, in sharing our thoughts and prayers to their families and friends. Our heart goes out to the greater community, and, of course, we stand here to not only try to understand better what happened, how it happened, but do the work necessary to try to ensure that it doesn't happen again—not in Atlanta, not anywhere in the United States of America.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of the nomination of my friend California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to serve as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

As we all know, as we all feel, our Nation is going through one of the toughest health crises in our history. The COVID–19 pandemic has taken an incredible toll on our country. Every State has been impacted. Every community has suffered, especially working-class communities and communities of color, like the very neighborhoods that Attorney General Becerra and I grew up in. These communities are hurting and people are dying at alarming rates, and they desperately need someone who knows these communities to their core.

Throughout his career, Xavier Becerra has always fought to improve the lives of his constituents. As the first Latino attorney general of California, he made it his mission to tackle the structural inequalities in our healthcare system. As has been referenced already, Attorney General Becerra was the leading force behind the lawsuit to protect the Affordable Care Act. Yes, he had the audacity to maintain protections for people with preexisting conditions and for those suffering from a mental illness. Over the course of this past year, he has also fought to protect frontline healthcare workers from further exposure to COVID–19.

Xavier Becerra's parents emigrated from Mexico, just like my parents did, with a dream of building a better life for themselves and their family. Just a few days ago, I spoke in this Chamber about my family's history and journey in this country. A hard-working short-order cook and housekeeper raised the son who now serves in the U.S. Senate. The same is true for Xavier Becerra's family. He, the son of a construction and clerical worker, is on the verge of becoming the most important health official in our Nation. That is the American dream.

But, unfortunately, tragically, over half a million Americans have had their dream cut short by COVID–19, over half a million lives lost and millions more lives upended by this pandemic. We need to act with urgency to end this crisis—urgency.

But as I rise today to address this Chamber, urgency is severely lacking. While millions of Americans continue to struggle, our Republican colleagues are dragging things out, playing politics with the confirmation of Attorney General Becerra, one of the most qualified nominees to lead the Department of Health and Human Services that this Chamber has ever considered. They have distorted his record.

Let me point out that many Members of this Senate have worked alongside Xavier Becerra here in Congress for decades. Republicans and Democrats know Xavier Becerra is both a thoughtful leader and someone who is always willing to listen to both sides of an argument. He built an outstanding reputation in the House, both as a legislator and as a colleague.

As attorney general of California, overseeing the largest department of justice in the Nation, second only to the U.S. Department of Justice, Xavier showed no fear in working across the aisle. In fact, he partnered with Republican attorneys general to increase access to lifesaving drugs to treat COVID–19. He worked across the aisle to protect drug discounts for health centers.

I can't help but point out the obvious. In fact, I am prepared to make this abundantly clear to the American people. The cynical delays and political games that we see being played are not actually about Mr. Becerra's qualifications. He is just as qualified as any of his predecessors. Sadly, Xavier Becerra is being held to a different standard—a different standard than other nominees this Chamber has supported and confirmed over the last 4 years, including our most recent Health and Human Services Secretary.

Let me also say this. As some of the first Latinos in our respective positions, both Xavier and I are not unfamiliar with being held to a different standard. It is a different standard today that is so stark that our colleagues are willing to delay his confirmation through the night. Yes, in the middle of a global health pandemic, Republicans are holding up the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. They are holding up the first Latino nominee to head this critical agency during a pandemic that has disproportionately devastated the Latino community.

It is time to let Xavier Becerra get to work. I urge my colleagues to end the delay on Xavier Becerra's confirmation for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Thank you, Mr. President.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and 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.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

• Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on confirmation: Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, Rollcall vote 123.

Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on cloture motion: Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, Rollcall vote 124.•

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

CONFIRMATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

• Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Katherine Tai to serve as the next United States Trade Representative. When confirmed, Ms. Tai will be the first woman of color and first Asian American to lead the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Katherine Tai's story is America's story. Her parents came to the United

States as graduate students and remained here to make a better life for themselves and their family, her father as a researcher at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and her mother as a scientist for the National Institutes of Health.

Given her parents' background, Katherine is no stranger to public service, and through her parents' hard work and dedication to make a better life for their daughter, she was able to attend Yale University and Harvard Law, became a talented trade lawyer, and was nominated by President Biden to lead the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. I have a deep appreciation for the Tais, their work ethic and their commitment to family. Representation matters, and Ms. Tai will be a representative for the United States in more ways than one.

Ms. Tai is a highly-qualified nominee with the experience to lead the U.S. trade policy at a critical time for our country, specifically as we continue to recover from the damage wrought by the coronavirus pandemic and rebuild our relationships with our allies abroad. She is a person who can help mend relationships and restore alliances.

Supporters have described her as a knowledgeable, tenacious trade expert who will work with a cross-section of advocates and stakeholders with the goal of bettering the lives of the American people and strengthening our economy at all levels. They have described her willingness to build coalitions across party lines, highlighting her broad support from both Democrats and Republicans, and from the labor, business, and environmental communities. They have referred to her time as a trade lawyer at the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, where she worked to enforce trade agreements with China to hold that country accountable before the World Trade Organization. They have highlighted her time as a lawyer with the House Ways and Means Committee, where she built partnerships and crafted agreements that received broad bipartisan approval. These included the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Trade Agreement, which passed the Senate by an 89–10 vote and the House by a 385–41 vote. Ms. Tai played a key role in crafting the agreement, which speaks to her skills and experience.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Ms. Tai will prioritize trade policies that promote workers, families, the environment, and local communities. I met with Ms. Tai just after President Biden nominated her, and during our conversation, it was clear she understands that trade policies have real world implications for everyday people. She knows that if trade deals are not working for people, then they need to change. People need to come first as we develop trade deals. At a time when people are still working to recover from the coronavirus, Ms. Tai is the Trade Representative we need for the United States.

A family emergency has prevented me from being here for today's vote, but if I were present, I would have voted to confirm Katherine Tai as U.S. Trade Representative.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support her nomination.●

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of Xavier Becerra's nomination to be Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

I am proud to have known Xavier Becerra for many years as both a friend and colleague. He has spent decades serving California, including as the State's attorney general and as a 12-term Congressman from Los Angeles.

Mr. Becerra was the first in his family to receive a 4-year college degree, earning his bachelor of arts in economics from Stanford University and, later, his juris doctorate from Stanford Law School. As a member of the House of Representatives, he was a strong advocate for the healthcare of his constituents and fought to make the Affordable Care Act law. And as California attorney general he has been a staunch defender of the Affordable Care Act, leading 20 States and the District of Columbia in defense of the Affordable Care Act before the Supreme Court.

As part of his focus on protecting the health of Americans, Mr. Becerra has worked on a bipartisan basis with multistate coalitions of attorneys general on issues still affecting our country today. These include the need to reduce youth exposure to tobacco products like e-cigarettes, increasing access to COVID–19 treatments, as well as addressing the opioid epidemic and the considerable harm it has caused families.

As our State's attorney general, Mr. Becerra has led the Nation's second largest department of justice behind only the U.S. Department of Justice. His experience leading large and diverse organizations will position him to successfully lead the Department of Health and Human Services, which is the Nation's largest Federal agency by budget.

As Secretary, he will lead the Nation's top health agency charged with enhancing the health and well-being of all Americans. In this global pandemic, he will play a lead role in overseeing the implementation of President Biden's national strategy for COVID–19 response, which is vital to defeating the virus that has plagued our country for far too long. His history-making nomination as the first Latino to manage this Department comes at a time when this pandemic is affecting communities of color at much higher rates than white Americans. And those of us who know him personally know the level of his concern and the strength of his dedication to protect the health and safety of all hard-working Americans and their families.

In short, Xavier Becerra is the right candidate to lead the Department of Health and Human Services at this time, and I strongly urge the Senate to confirm his nomination. Thank you.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, today I rise to speak in support of Xavier Becerra's nomination to serve s Secretary of Health and Human Services, HHS.

Attorney General Becerra will bring a fresh perspective to HHS at a critical time during this pandemic. While there is light at the end of the tunnel with the distribution of the corona virus vaccines, there is still work to do to end this pandemic and put our country on a road to recovery, and that is where Attorney General Becerra's leadership will be crucial.

Attorney General Becerra's 12 terms in the U.S. House of Representatives gave him a solid foundation in knowing how to set agendas and achieve results, which we saw deployed in his work as a key leader on the Committee on Ways and Means ranking member of the Subcommittee on Social Security, and chair of the House Democratic caucus.

He helped to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, modernize and strengthen Medicare, and helped pass the Affordable Care Act. His commitment to the letter and spirit of this law is something he carried into his role as California attorney general, fighting to maintain his State's ability to bring millions of previously uninsured residents under the Affordable Care Act's umbrella.

Last November, he led the defense of the Affordable Care Act in the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of 20 States and the District of Columbia. His tweet after the oral arguments concisely sums up the national importance of his effort: ''The ACA saves lives. It is the law of the land.'' He brings a strong commitment to using the law and regulatory tools to make access to health care and other vital services equitable—the very thing that makes our Nation strong.

I look forward to working with him on ensuring that everyone has access to quality and affordable healthcare, and I know he will be a partner in the fight against the corona virus and our goal of getting all eligible Americans vaccinated, even in hard-to-reach areas.

Last week, President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act, which included major funding to address the—Nation's worsening mental health and addiction crisis. This is a high priority of mine and an issue which Attorney General Becerra has firsthand experience. He started his career as a legal aid attorney in Massachusetts, supporting clients contending with mental health issues. I am eager to work with him on this issue.

Addressing the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs is another area where Attorney General Becerra has shown key leadership. He and I share a belief that fairer competition means

increased access to affordable prescription drugs and better public health. As California attorney general, he investigated and brought enforcement actions against drug manufacturers' anticompetitive business practices to help reduce drug prices and ensure that people have access to the drugs they need. In March 2020, he led a bipartisan group of 46 States attorneys general who successfully advocated before the U.S. Supreme Court to uphold the rights of States to regulate and address the rising cost of prescription drugs.

The United States must do more to ensure that new technologies have appropriate privacy and security protections for health data. At a September 2020 hearing on the need for Federal data privacy legislation, Attorney General Becerra told me and other members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation that ''every consumer should be able to own and control his or her data'' and that ''if we decide that we don't want anyone to use [our data], it's our choosing.'' His testimony was reassuring, and I look forward to working with him to ensure consumers can have a peace of mind when it comes to the security of their personal health data.

Given the pandemic's spotlight on the vulnerability of our Nation's seniors, I am eager to work with the Biden administration to improve the safety and weTI-being of older Americans. When my 92–year-old dad living in a memory care facility was diagnosed with COVID–19 last year, I was only able to visit him through a window. He recognized me, but he just didn't understand why we couldn't be in the same room together. Tens of thousands of families have been through these wrenching situations over the past year and want to see the Federal Government doing more. Attorney General Becerra recently moved to make the California Department of Justice Medicaid Fraud Control Unit a full-fledged division, underscoring his commitment to protecting seniors and people with disabilities. I know his leadership will place the needs of seniors front and center.

Attorney General Becerra has the expertise and experience and the enforcement and regulatory savvy to handle the job of protecting public health, strengthening our hospitals and healthcare system, making sure people have access to quality, affordable healthcare, and supporting our healthcare workers. And as the first Latino to lead the Department of Health and Human Services, he will bring a personal understanding of the immediate need for equitable access to care.

With that, I ask my colleagues to support the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

CONFIRMATION OF ISABELLA CASILLAS GUZMAN

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I rise today to support the confirmation of Isabel Guzman, a dedicated public servant and successful small businesswoman, to lead the Small Business Administration.

Small businesses are a cornerstone of Maryland's economy, creating jobs, driving innovation, and anchoring communities. Isabel Guzman's extensive leadership experience serving at SBA under the Obama administration and running her own small businesses positions her well to support our small business communities as we finish the fight against the COVID–19 pandemic and address the unique challenges faced by women- and minority-owned small businesses across Maryland.

In her new role as SBA Administrator, she will inherit an economic crisis compounded by a mismanaged pandemic that has devastated the small business community from retail to restaurants and bars to sole-proprietorships. She will be charged not only with administering critical small business relief programs, including the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program and the Paycheck Protection Program, but also with building back better to shape the environment for a thriving small business community. I look forward to working closely with her to ensure that we build an inclusive economy that encourages and supports local entrepreneurs.

REMEMBERING LARRY ''CLIZ'' CLISBY

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, today I wish to honor and recognize the distinguished legacy of Larry ''Cliz'' Clisby, who passed away on February 27, 2021, at the age of 74 after a valiant fight against cancer. Famously known across the State of Indiana as the legendary Voice of the Boilermakers, he will forever be remembered for his unmatched play-by-play commentary of Purdue basketball and his trademark ''Bullseye!'' calls during crunch time.

Born and raised in Ohio, Larry graduated from Warren Howland High School and Kent State University. Shortly after college and service in the U.S. Army, Larry started his broadcasting career in Paducah, KY. However, his time in Paducah was brief, as he moved to West Lafayette, IN, to work for WLFI-TV in the sports department in 1977. During his early career in the Lafayette area, Larry called high school basketball games and assisted during Purdue sports broadcasts. It wasn't until 1982 that Larry became the full-time radio announcer for the Boilermakers.

Over the course of nearly 40 years, Larry called a total of 1,890 Purdue men's basketball games, including dozens of high-profile Indiana vs. Purdue rivalry games. Since the 1980s, Larry was involved in many of Purdue's historic moments, including one Big Ten Tournament title, nine Big Ten Championship Seasons, 28 NCAA Tournaments, and three Elite Eight appearances. In 2018, he was inducted into the Indiana Sportswriters and Sportscasters Hall of Fame, and he received one of Indiana's highest honors, the Sagamore of the Wabash, from Governor Eric Holcomb in 2020.

From the Purdue sports staff to the team players, everyone saw Larry as a true, dedicated Boilermaker and not just a typical play-by-play announcer. Throughout his career, Larry devoted his charisma, talents, and life to the Lafayette community, and I believe his work will serve as a benchmark for those who aspire to join the field of sports radio.

I ask my colleagues to join me in extending our sympathies to Larry's wife, Michelle; his children, Chad and Carly; his sister, Carol; his stepchildren and grandchildren; and all of his family and friends as they mourn his loss. And to Larry's Purdue University family, I wish his beloved Boilermakers many, many ''Bullseye!'' moments in the years to come.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO MARGARET HUETTL

• Mr. CRAMER. Mr. President, as we observe National Women's History Month throughout March, it gives me great pleasure to recognize one of North Dakota's own history makers. Margaret Huettl from Minot has become my State's first female Eagle Scout and is a member of the inaugural class of young women to receive this high honor across the United States.

Margaret is a member of Scout Troop 5401 of the Northern Lights Council. A recent graduate of Minot High School, Margaret is currently studying biology education at Minot State University. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, which limited many Scouting group activities over the past year, she continued pressing on toward her goal of completing the merit badges necessary to earn the award. For her Eagle Scout project, she spent 238 hours building a pit for gaga ball, which is a variation of dodgeball, for outdoor activities at her home church, Zion Lutheran.

She said earning the 21 merit badges, along with completing her project and the other requirements for the Eagle Scout Award, helped her further develop leadership, time management, and communication skills. She intends to continue her involvement with Troop 5401, transitioning to an adult leader this year.

I congratulate Margaret on achieving this award through hard work and persistence and a being a trailblazer for other young women who have an interest in the Scouting program. With only 6 percent of all scouts attaining the rank of Eagle Scout, she now will be recognized alongside the 2.5 million

others who have earned this prestigious award since it was created in 1911. She will learn, as have other Eagle Scouts, that throughout her life, this accomplishment will bring her recognition as being a person of the highest caliber and character. I fully expect to hear much more from Margaret in the future as she excels in academic, professional, and personal endeavors.●

RECOGNIZING BISSON'S SUGAR HOUSE

● Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, today I would like to recognize Bisson's Sugar House, a New Hampshire institution that is celebrating its 100th anniversary. March is Maple Month in New Hampshire, where maple producers across our State produce more than 90,000 gallons of maple syrup, and the Bisson family represents three generations of this great and tasty tradition.

Lazzare Bisson and his nephew Armand found Bisson's Sugar House in Berlin in 1921, and ran the business together successfully for 15 years. Lazzare then passed the business on to Armand and his wife, Juliette. In 1953, they constructed a new sugar house to support their growing business, and since then, they have welcomed families from New Hampshire and beyond to see their work each spring.

The Bisson family has prioritized preserving the traditional sugaring experience, while also modernizing their operations in order to provide high-quality, delicious maple products to their customers. Each year, the Bisson family taps more than 3,000 trees, and they still boil their sap on a wood-fired evaporator built by Armand and Juliette more than 50 years ago. During the height of the sugaring season in March and April, they make candy with the same evaporator they have used since the 1940s.

Since 1988, Bisson's Sugar House has been run by Armand and Juliette Bisson's niece Muriel and her husband Lucien Blais. For many families, an annual trip to Bisson's Sugar House marks the beginning of spring. As the sugar business has passed from generation to generation, the Bisson family's work has encouraged Granite Staters to treasure our past and embrace the future.

I hope you will join me in celebrating the 100th anniversary of Bisson's Sugar House and sending them best wishes for a successful harvest and many more years of sharing their traditions with the people of New Hampshire.●

TRIBUTE TO WALTER FRANK YORK

● Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, on Monday, March 15, the community of Ashland, KS, celebrated the career of someone who dedicated nearly 45 years to the Stockgrowers State Bank. Walter Frank York has called Ashland home since the day he was born. His parents, Russell and Marjorie, brought him up in a modest home on a farmer's income during the 1950s and 1960s. Frank, as he came to be called by his family and friends, went on to study finance at Kansas State University, but the Vietnam war draft up-ended his plans before graduation.

Frank ultimately did not serve due to a back injury incurred while playing football for Ashland High, but the draft experience took him to Eagle County, CO, where he used his education to assist his sister with a new business that she was operating in Vail Village near the well-known ski resort. While taking on this challenge in Colorado, he finished his degree at CU Boulder, despite his long-lasting love for the K-State Wildcats. After earning his degree, his route led back home when he applied for a vacant position at a bank in Ashland. His first day at Stockgrowers State Bank was March 15, 1976.

Working as a loans officer, Frank added a sense of small-town care for each of his customers over the years. After all, he would frequently see his customers at church, at the grocery store, and at Friday night sporting events in Ashland and surrounding communities in southwest Kansas. In 2007, he earned the title of executive vice president after years of loyally helping customers. One recent highlight from his career was being awarded as a recipient of the Pioneer Award in early 2020, which is given annually by the Kansas Ag Bankers division of the Kansas Bankers Association. When he achieved the award, one customer of his remarked to the Kansas Ag Bankers: ''Frank just makes it simple to do business and helps keep me connected to the Ashland community.'' In return, Frank likes to share that his clients and colleagues became ''family'' to him. Being surrounded by good people in an enjoyable community helped keep Frank at Stockgrowers for the entirety of his banking career.

I would be remiss if I did not speak of community involvement while sharing about Frank York. Whether it was being involved in his children's Boy Scouts troop, coaching local youth baseball programs in the summer, announcing football games for Ashland High, broadcasting SPIAA League high school basketball tournaments, or serving on the board of organizations near and far in Kansas, Frank has done it all. He currently serves on the board for KJIL Great Plains Christian Radio, in addition to the Kansas Leadership Center's board, and serves as president of the alumni board for his K-State chapter of Delta Upsilon fraternity.

I have had the joy of getting to know Frank on a more personal level in this past decade, as his son Tyler joined my staff after earning his degree at K-State. Frank lives in the same farmhouse that his grandfather built in 1912, just a few miles outside of Ashland. Farming and ranching has been a side passion and a hobby for him since he returned home for a career at Stockgrowers. It is something that he intends to continue for years ahead, thanks to the local volunteer firefighters that spared the York farmstead from destruction in March 2017 as wildfires burned close to 80 percent of Clark County. He considers himself blessed to have been of the more fortunate residents of the area. While I have appreciated his friendship over the years, Frank was an invaluable resource to me in the aftermath of the Starbuck Fire. Along with many others from Clark County, he informed me on ways we could help direct the USDA and other governmental agencies to coordinate in providing assistance to those that were severely affected.

The announcement of retirement from Frank came in mid-2020. His emotional final day at Stockgrowers State Bank was on December 31, 2020. Due to the challenges that the pandemic brought to communities of all sizes, a celebration of his retirement, unfortunately, had to be postponed. However, I couldn't think of a better date to celebrate the career of Frank York than the 45th anniversary of his first day of employment at Stockgrowers State Bank. While the difficulties of the pandemic will still prevent many well-wishers from making it to Ashland to personally offer their congratulations, I know that the amount of lives that have been positively affected by Frank are plenty and stretch far beyond Ashland. His family—including wife, Sue, and children Joshua, Tyler, Emily, Adam, and Jennifer—should all be extremely proud of Frank's career. I offer my sincere congratulations to someone I am proud to call my friend, Frank York.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Roberts, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

In executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

At 10:32 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 485. An act to reauthorize the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1799. An act to amend the Small Business Act and the CARES Act to extend the

covered period for the paycheck protection program, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that pursuant to 15 U.S.C. 1024(a), and the order of the House of January 4, 2021, the Speaker appoints the following Members on the part of House of Representatives to the Joint Economic Committee: Mr. TRONE of Maryland, Mrs. BEATTY of Ohio, Mr. POCAN of Wisconsin, Mr. PETERS of California, Ms. DAVIDS of Kansas, Mr. LAHOOD of Illinois, Ms. HERRERA BEUTLER of Washington, and Mr. ESTES of Kansas.

At 6:07 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 1085. An act to award three congressional gold medals to the United States Capitol Police and those who protected the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021.

MEASURES DISCHARGED

The following bill was discharged from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and referred to the Committee on Armed Services:

S. 344. A bill to amend title 10, United States Code, to provide for concurrent receipt of veterans' disability compensation and retirement pay for disability retirees with fewer than 20 years of service and a combat-related disability, and for other purposes.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC–637. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Air Plan Approval; California; South Coast Air Quality Management District; Ventura County Air Pollution Control District; Correction'' (FRL No. 10021–07–Region 9) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 15, 2021; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–638. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Air Plan Approval; Kentucky; Jefferson County Gasoline Loading Facilities at Existing Bulk Terminals and New Bulk Plants'' (FRL No. 10021–39–Region 4) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 15, 2021; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–639. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Air Plan Approval; Kentucky; Jefferson County Existing and New VOC Storage Vessels Rule Changes'' (FRL No. 10021–19–Region 4) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 15, 2021; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–640. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Amendment of 40 CFR 63.6(f)(1) and 40 CFR 63(h)(1) to Reflect Court Vacatur of Exemption from Emission Standards During Periods of Startup, Shutdown, and Malfunction'' (FRL No. 10019–05–OAR) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 15, 2021; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–641. A communication from the Endangered Species Biologist, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled ''Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Removal of the Bradshaw's Lomatium (Lomatium bradshawii) From the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife'' (RIN1018–BD59) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on March 15, 2021; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

EC–642. A communication from the Chair, Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report entitled ''March 2021 Report to Congress on Medicaid and CHIP''; to the Committee on Finance.

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted:

By Mrs. MURRAY for the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

*Vivek Hallegere Murthy, of Florida, to be Medical Director in the Regular Corps of the Public Health Service, subject to qualifications therefor as provided by law and regulations, and to be Surgeon General of the Public Health Service for a term of four years.

*Rachel Leland Levine, of Pennsylvania, to be an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services.

*Nomination was reported with recommendation that it be confirmed subject to the nominee's commitment to respond to requests to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Senate.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. BENNET, Mr. CARDIN, Mr. CARPER, Ms. WARREN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. WARNER, Mr. WYDEN, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. PETERS, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. CASEY, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. MARKEY, Ms. SMITH, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. KING, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Ms. CANTWELL, Mr. KAINE, Mr. REED, Mr. BROWN, Mr. COONS, Mr. HEINRICH, Mr. SCHATZ, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Ms. HIRONO, Ms. ROSEN, Ms. HASSAN, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. TESTER, Ms. SINEMA, Mr. HICKENLOOPER, Mr. KELLY, Mr. LUJÁN, Mr. WARNOCK, Mr. PADILLA, and Mr. OSSOFF):

S. 1. A bill to expand Americans' access to the ballot box, reduce the influence of big money in politics, strengthen ethics rules for public servants, and implement other anti-corruption measures for the purpose of fortifying our democracy, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

By Mr. WYDEN (for himself, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, Mr. BENNET, and Mr. BOOKER):

S. 784. A bill to amend the Social Security Act to establish a new employment, training, and supportive services program for unemployed and underemployed individuals, including individuals with barriers to employment and those who are unemployed or underemployed as a result of COVID–19, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. COTTON (for himself, Mr. SCOTT of Florida, and Mr. INHOFE):

S. 785. A bill to withdraw normal trade relations treatment from, and apply certain provisions of title IV of the Trade Act of 1974 to, products of the People's Republic of China, and to expand the eligibility requirements for products of the People's Republic of China to receive normal trade relations treatment in the future, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. YOUNG (for himself and Mr. PETERS):

S. 786. A bill to require the Secretary of Transportation to review laws relating to the illegal passing of school buses and to execute a public safety messaging campaign relating to illegal passing of school buses, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. CASSIDY (for himself and Mr. KENNEDY):

S. 787. A bill to amend the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area Act to extend the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to provide assistance to the local coordinating entity for the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area under that Act; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. MARSHALL (for himself, Mrs. HYDE-SMITH, and Mr. HAWLEY):

S. 788. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to establish a nonrefundable tax credit for the purchase of gun safes and gun safety courses; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. ROUNDS (for himself, Ms. SMITH, Mr. LANKFORD, and Ms. SINEMA):

S. 789. A bill to repeal certain obsolete laws relating to Indians; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

By Mr. PORTMAN (for himself and Ms. HASSAN):

S. 790. A bill to amend the Federal Advisory Committee Act to increase the transparency of Federal advisory committees, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

By Mr. BOOKER:

S. 791. A bill to amend title 40, United States Code, to direct the Administrator of General Services to incorporate practices and strategies to reduce bird fatalities resulting from collisions with certain public buildings, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mrs. FISCHER (for herself, Mr. TESTER, Mr. WICKER, and Ms. SMITH):

S. 792. A bill to amend the Motor Carrier Safety Improvement Act of 1999 to modify certain agricultural exemptions for hours of service requirements, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. LEE (for himself, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. BRAUN, Mr. CASSIDY, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. DAINES, Mr. HAWLEY, Mr. HAGERTY, Mr. INHOFE, Mr. LANKFORD, Mr. PAUL, Mr. RISCH, Mr. RUBIO, and Mr. SCOTT of Florida):

S. 793. A bill to require the Congressional Budget Office to make publicly available the fiscal and mathematical models, data, and other details of computations used in cost analysis and scoring; to the Committee on the Budget.

By Mr. SANDERS (for himself, Ms. WARREN, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. MARKEY):

S. 794. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to impose a corporate tax rate increase on companies whose ratio of compensation of the CEO or other highest paid employee to median worker compensation is more than 50 to 1, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. DUCKWORTH (for herself, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. WICKER, and Mrs. HYDE-SMITH):

S. 795. A bill to establish the Emmett Till and Mamie Till-Mobley and Roberts Temple National Historic Site in the State of Illinois, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Ms. DUCKWORTH (for herself and Ms. COLLINS):

S. 796. A bill to codify maternity care coordination programs at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. SCHATZ (for himself and Mr. THUNE):

S. 797. A bill to require transparency, accountability, and protections for consumers online; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

By Mr. SCOTT of Florida:

S. 798. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that the 2021 Recovery Rebates are not provided to prisoners; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. COONS (for himself, Mr. CASSIDY, Ms. SMITH, Mr. HOEVEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mrs. CAPITO, Ms. DUCKWORTH, Mr. BRAUN, Mr. TESTER, Ms. MURKOWSKI, and Mr. MANCHIN):

S. 799. A bill to require the Secretary of Energy to establish programs for carbon dioxide capture, transport, utilization, and storage, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

By Mr. BROWN (for himself and Ms. COLLINS):

S. 800. A bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to permit nurse practitioners and physician assistants to satisfy the documentation requirement under the Medicare program for coverage of certain shoes for individuals with diabetes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. CASSIDY (for himself, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. CARPER, Mr. YOUNG, and Ms. ROSEN):

S. 801. A bill to identify and address barriers to coverage of remote physiologic devices under State Medicaid programs to improve maternal and child health outcomes for pregnant and postpartum women; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. RISCH (for himself, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Mr. CRAPO, Mrs. CAPITO, Mr. HOEVEN, Ms. ROSEN, Mr. KENNEDY, and Ms. MURKOWSKI):

S. 802. A bill to modify the Federal and State Technology Partnership Program of the Small Business Administration, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Mr. MARSHALL (for himself, Mrs. HYDE-SMITH, Mr. BRAUN, and Mr. HAWLEY):

S. 803. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to remove short-barreled rifles from the definition of firearms for purposes of the National Firearms Act, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Ms. COLLINS:

S. 804. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to increase the limitation on the amount individuals filing jointly can deduct for certain State and local taxes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. LEE (for himself, Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina, Mr. CORNYN, Mrs. BLACKBURN, Mr. JOHNSON, Mr. INHOFE, and Mr. CRUZ):

S. 805. A bill to repeal the wage requirements of the Davis-Bacon Act; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mr. CARPER, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. BOOKER, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN):

S. 806. A bill to amend title 23, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Transportation to establish a program to provide grants to carry out activities to benefit pollinators on roadsides and highway rights-of-way, including the planting and seeding of native, locally-appropriate grasses and wildflowers, including milkweed, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 807. A bill to permit the televising of Supreme Court proceedings; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

By Mr. REED (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. WARNER, Mr. CRAMER, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, and Mr. WYDEN):

S. 808. A bill to amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to promote transparency in the oversight of cybersecurity risks at publicly traded companies; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

By Mr. MERKLEY (for himself, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mr. BOOKER, Mr. VAN HOLLEN, and Mr. PADILLA):

S. 809. A bill to encourage and facilitate efforts by States and other stakeholders to conserve and sustain the western population of monarch butterflies, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

By Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. BROWN, Mr. DURBIN, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. SCHUMER, Mr. CASEY, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. COONS, Mrs. MURRAY, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Ms. HIRONO, Ms. SMITH, and Mr. BOOKER):

S. 810. A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to expand the list of diseases associated with exposure to certain herbicide agents for which there is a presumption of service connection for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam to include hypertension, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. COONS, Mr. HAGERTY, and Mrs. SHAHEEN):

S. 811. A bill to establish the Taiwan Fellowship Program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself and Mr. INHOFE):

S. 812. A bill to direct the Secretary of State to develop a strategy to regain observer status for Taiwan in the World Health Organization, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mrs. CAPITO, Ms. WARREN, and Mr. BRAUN):

S. 813. A bill to promote and ensure delivery of high-quality special education and related services to students with visual disabilities or who are deaf or hard of hearing or deaf-blind through instructional methodologies meeting their unique learning needs, to enhance accountability for the provision of such services, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. RISCH (for himself, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. PORTMAN, Mr. MURPHY, Mr. BARRASSO, and Mrs. SHAHEEN):

S. 814. A bill to promote security partnership with Ukraine, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. RUBIO (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. RISCH, Mr. BRAUN, Mr. CRAPO, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr. LANKFORD, Mrs. CAPITO, Mrs. HYDE-SMITH, Mr. SCOTT of South Carolina, Mr. ROUNDS, and Mr. HAWLEY):

S. 815. A bill to amend the Small Business Act and the CARES Act to extend the covered period for the paycheck protection program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

By Mr. RISCH:

S. 816. A bill to amend the Diplomatic Security Act of 1986 to provide for improved serious security incident investigations, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mrs. BLACKBURN (for herself, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. CRAPO, Ms. ERNST, Mr. HAGERTY, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. SCOTT of Florida, Ms. SINEMA, and Mr. WICKER):

S. Res. 119. A resolution establishing the Congressional Gold Star Family Fellowship Program for the placement in offices of Senators of children, spouses, and siblings of members of the Armed Forces who are hostile casualties or who have died from a training-related injury; to the Committee on Rules and Administration.

By Mr. RISCH (for himself, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. KAINE, and Mr. CASSIDY):

S. Res. 120. A resolution recognizing the Ninth Summit of the Americas and reaffirming the commitment of the United States to a more prosperous, secure, and democratic Western Hemisphere; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

By Mr. BRAUN (for himself, Mr. YOUNG, Mr. BROWN, Ms. WARREN, and Mr. MARKEY):

S. Res. 121. A resolution honoring the 100th anniversary of the birth of George Daniel Crowe; considered and agreed to.

ADDITIONAL COSPONSORS

S. 127

At the request of Mr. REED, the name of the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. SMITH) was added as a cosponsor of S. 127, a bill to support library infrastructure.

S. 231

At the request of Mr. PETERS, the name of the Senator from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) was added as a cosponsor of S. 231, a bill to direct the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency to develop guidance for firefighters and other emergency response personnel on best practices to protect them from exposure to PFAS and to

limit and prevent the release of PFAS into the environment, and for other purposes.

S. 401

At the request of Mr. LANKFORD, the name of the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 401, a bill to amend the Public Health Service Act to prohibit governmental discrimination against health care providers that do not participate in abortion.

S. 425

At the request of Mr. MARKEY, the name of the Senator from New York (Mrs. GILLIBRAND) was added as a cosponsor of S. 425, a bill to require States to establish complete streets programs, and for other purposes.

S. 479

At the request of Mr. WICKER, the name of the Senator from Wyoming (Ms. LUMMIS) was added as a cosponsor of S. 479, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to reinstate advance refunding bonds.

S. 488

At the request of Mr. HAGERTY, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 488, a bill to provide for congressional review of actions to terminate or waive sanctions imposed with respect to Iran.

S. 545

At the request of Mr. PORTMAN, the name of the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL) was added as a cosponsor of S. 545, a bill to permanently exempt payments made from the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Account from sequestration under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985.

S. 596

At the request of Mr. CARPER, the name of the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. HOEVEN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 596, a bill to amend title XVIII of the Social Security Act to provide for the coordination of programs to prevent and treat obesity, and for other purposes.

S. 611

At the request of Mr. DURBIN, the names of the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the Senator from Missouri (Mr. BLUNT), the Senator from Maryland (Mr. VAN HOLLEN) and the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT) were added as cosponsors of S. 611, a bill to deposit certain funds into the Crime Victims Fund, to waive matching requirements, and for other purposes.

S. 628

At the request of Mr. JOHNSON, the name of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM) was added as a cosponsor of S. 628, a bill to increase access to agency guidance documents.

S. 634

At the request of Ms. COLLINS, the name of the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SULLIVAN) was added as a cosponsor of S. 634, a bill to support and expand civic engagement and political leadership of adolescent girls around the world, and other purposes.

S. 661

At the request of Mr. HOEVEN, the name of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM) was added as a cosponsor of S. 661, a bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the qualifying advanced coal project credit, and for other purposes.

S. 662

At the request of Mrs. FISCHER, the name of the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY) was added as a cosponsor of S. 662, a bill to establish an interactive online dashboard to allow the public to review information for Federal grant funding related to mental health programs.

S. 697

At the request of Mr. PORTMAN, the name of the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT) was added as a cosponsor of S. 697, a bill to require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint commemorative coins in recognition of the Bicentennial of Harriet Tubman's birth.

S. 723

At the request of Ms. COLLINS, the names of the Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY) and the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN) were added as cosponsors of S. 723, a bill to amend the Small Business Act and the CARES Act to extend the covered period for the paycheck protection program, and for other purposes.

S. 730

At the request of Mr. BRAUN, the names of the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL), the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) and the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE) were added as cosponsors of S. 730, a bill to amend title VI of the Social Security Act to remove the prohibition on States and territories against lowering their taxes.

S. 748

At the request of Mrs. SHAHEEN, the names of the Senator from West Virginia (Mrs. CAPITO) and the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. MANCHIN) were added as cosponsors of S. 748, a bill to provide for an extension of the temporary suspension of Medicare sequestration during the COVID–19 public health emergency.

S. 758

At the request of Mr. BARRASSO, the name of the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER) was added as a cosponsor of S. 758, a bill to support financing of affordable and reliable energy projects by international financial institutions, and for other purposes.

S. RES. 105

At the request of Mr. MERKLEY, the name of the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. CASEY) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 105, a resolution condemning the coup in Burma and calling for measures to ensure the safety of the Burmese people, including Rohingya, who have been threatened and displaced by a campaign of genocide conducted by the Burmese military.

S. RES. 117

At the request of Mr. MENENDEZ, the name of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) was added as a cosponsor of S. Res. 117, a resolution expressing support for the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, or the Belfast Agreement, and subsequent agreements and arrangements for implementation to support peace on the island of Ireland.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. SCHATZ (for himself and Mr. THUNE):

S. 797. A bill to require transparency, accountability, and protections for consumers online; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, social media platforms have become a pretty significant part of Americans' lives. We use them to stay up to date on news from friends and family—something that has become especially essential during the pandemic—to communicate with relatives and friends, for entertainment, and as a shopping resource. Social media sites provide ways to network, to connect with like-minded individuals from fellow theater lovers to fellow basketball fans, to advocate for causes that we believe in, to conduct business, even to date, and more and more we rely on social media sites as a primary source of news and information, from Presidential election news to updates on COVID vaccinations.

Social media offers a lot of benefits and opportunities, but the increasing dominance of social media, particularly in the news and information space, has also raised concerns. Consumers have become increasingly troubled about the way their information is used by social media platforms and how these sites decide what news and information we see. And there are increasing numbers of anecdotes to suggest that some social media platforms are moderating content in a biased or political way.

Currently, content moderation on social media platforms is governed by section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which was enacted into law 25 years ago. Section 230 provides internet sites that host user-generated content—sites like YouTube or Twitter or Facebook—with immunity for the content that users post on their sites. So, for example, if somebody posts a video on YouTube that contains illegal content, YouTube isn't held legally responsible for that content.

Section 230 has been critical to the development of the internet as we know it today. Without section 230 protections, many of the sites we rely on for social connection or news or entertainment would never have come into being.

But as the internet and social media have grown and developed, it has also become clear that some changes need to be made. In particular, it has become increasingly clear that sites need to provide greater transparency when it comes to their content moderation practices and decisions. Social media sites are no longer just providing a platform for user-generated content as they did in their infancy. They are now making a lot of decisions about that content and carefully shaping our social media experience—what ads we see, what posts we see, what news stories we see.

Currently, Federal law does not require that social media sites be at all accountable to consumers for those content moderation decisions. That is why, today, I am introducing the Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency Act, or the PACT Act, along with my colleague Senator SCHATZ. Our bill would preserve the benefits of section 230, like the internet growth and widespread dissemination of free speech it has enabled, while increasing accountability and consumer transparency around content moderation.

Now, content moderation is certainly not all bad. For example, most of us are happy to have YouTube or Instagram suggest additional content that matches the music that we like to listen to or the hobbies that we are interested in. The problem is that content moderation has been and largely continues to be a black box, with consumers having little or no idea how the information they see has been shaped by the sites that they are visiting.

The PACT Act would address this problem by increasing transparency around the content moderation process. Sites would be required to provide an easily digestible disclosure of their content moderation practices for users, and, importantly, they would be required to explain their decisions to remove material to consumers.

Until relatively recently, sites like Facebook and Twitter would remove a user's post without explanation and without an appeals process. And even as platforms start to shape up their act with regard to transparency and due process, it is still hard for users to get good information about how content is moderated.

Under the PACT Act, if a site chooses to remove your post, it has to tell you why it decided to remove your post and explain how your post violated the site's terms of use. The PACT Act would also require sites to have an appeals process. So if Facebook, for example, removes one of your posts, it would not only have to tell you why, but it would have to provide a way for you to appeal that decision.

We have seen increased concern lately about news articles being removed from social media sites. Under the PACT Act, a newspaper whose article was posted on Facebook or Twitter and then removed by one of those platforms could challenge Facebook or Twitter, which would have to provide a reason for removing the article and allow the newspaper to appeal the decision.

The PACT Act would also help us develop the data necessary to demonstrate whether social media platforms are removing content in a biased or political fashion. As I said earlier, there has been increasing concern about biased content moderation on social media sites. The PACT Act requires detailed transparency reports every 6 months from large social media platforms, like Twitter and Facebook, which will provide the data it needed to determine whether and where biased moderation exists.

The PACT Act would also bolster efforts by State governments to hold social media platforms accountable. The bill would allow State attorneys general to bring civil lawsuits against social media platforms when these platforms have violated Federal civil laws.

The PACT Act would also require companies to remove material that has been adjudicated as illegal by a court. Internet platforms would be required to remove illegal content within 4 days. Failure to remove illegal material would result in the platform's losing its 230 protections for that content or activity, a provision that matches a recommendation made by the Trump Department of Justice for section 230 reform.

I am grateful to Senator SCHATZ for partnering with me on this legislation. Our bill is a serious, bipartisan approach to the issue of section 230 reform, and it would go a long way toward making social media platforms more accountable to consumers and increasing transparency around the content moderation process.

I invite our colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join us in advancing this legislation.

By Ms. COLLINS:

S. 804. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to increase the limitation on the amount individuals filing jointly can deduct for certain State and local taxes; to the Committee on Finance.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, this is the time of year when people are calculating their taxes and filing their returns. There are inequities in our Tax Code, and the bill I am introducing today, the SALT Deduction Fairness Act, would help remedy one of these inequities. This bill would ensure that limits on State and local tax deductions, also known as SALT deductions, do not disproportionately and unfairly penalize married couples.

Currently, the amount in State and local taxes that both single and married filers may deduct from their annual income taxes is capped at $10,000. Single filers and married filers are treated the same, and married people who file their taxes separately are limited to $5,000 each. In other words, people would be better off not getting married when it comes to the SALT deduction. My bill removes this penalty by simply doubling the deduction to $20,000 for married filers.

This is the situation we have now: Two single people can both claim $10,000 worth of State and local income taxes as a deduction on their Federal returns, but if they get married, they can claim only $10,000 together. This is a classic example of a marriage tax penalty.

When the Senate considered the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017, I worked to keep the SALT deduction in the Federal Tax Code because of the increased tax burden its elimination would have imposed on many Mainers who pay property taxes on their seasonal cottages as well as their homes, who remit annual excise taxes on their vehicles, and who are subject to State income taxes.

The SALT deduction has been in the Tax Code since 1913, when the Federal income tax was first established. It is intended to protect families from double taxation, from essentially paying a tax on a tax.

The Senate adopted my amendment, which paralleled that of the House, to retain the deduction for State and local taxes up to $10,000. This deduction is especially important to families living in high-tax States, like Maine, which has one of our Nation's highest State taxes and where many residents own second homes, like camps on Maine's beautiful lakes. Last year, an analysis by WalletHub found that Maine had the fourth highest overall tax burden behind only New York, Hawaii, and Vermont. Yet Maine's median household income ranked only 35th in the Nation and was approximately $6,800 below the U.S. median household income. So maintaining this deduction provides important tax relief for those Mainers who continue to itemize their deductions. Yet we can do better. We can make the SALT deduction fairer by eliminating the marriage penalty that limits a married couple to just $10,000; whereas, if they were not married, they could each claim $10,000.

According to the U.S. Census, there are more than 60 million married couples living in our Nation. Our Tax Code should be fair to them. We should not create a situation in which married couples would have been better off financially, in terms of taxes, had they not married. One way to accomplish this goal is to double their access to deductions for the State and local taxes they pay, including from properties they share, such as their homes. This legislation would remedy this double taxation problem and eliminate the marriage tax penalty when it comes to the SALT tax deduction.

It boils down to this: We simply should not be unfairly penalizing American taxpayers for being married.

I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense bill to fix this marriage tax penalty.

By Mr. DURBIN (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, and Ms. KLOBUCHAR):

S. 807. A bill to permit the televising of Supreme Court proceedings; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

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

S. 807

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Cameras in the Courtroom Act''.

SEC. 2. AMENDMENT TO TITLE 28.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 45 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by inserting at the end the following:

''§ 678. Televising Supreme Court proceedings

''The Supreme Court shall permit television coverage of all open sessions of the Court unless the Court decides, by a vote of the majority of justices, that allowing such coverage in a particular case would constitute a violation of the due process rights of 1 or more of the parties before the Court.''.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The chapter analysis for chapter 45 of title 28, United States Code, is amended by inserting at the end the following:

''678. Televising Supreme Court proceedings.''.

By Mr. REED (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. WARNER, Mr. CRAMER, Ms. CORTEZ MASTO, and Mr. WYDEN):

S. 808. A bill to amend the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 to promote transparency in the oversight of cybersecurity risks at publicly traded companies; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, today I am reintroducing the Cybersecurity Disclosure Act along with three members of the Select Committee on Intelligence, Chairman WARNER and Senators COLLINS and WYDEN, in addition to Senators CORTEZ MASTO and CRAMER, who serve with me on the Senate Banking Committee. In response to serious data breaches of various companies, our legislation asks each publicly traded company to include—in Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) disclosures to investors—information on whether any member of the Board of Directors is a cybersecurity expert, and if not, why having this expertise on the Board of Directors is not necessary because of other cybersecurity steps taken by the publicly traded company. To be clear, the legislation does not require companies to take any actions other than to provide this disclosure to its investors.

As EY, also known as Ernst & Young, noted in an August 2020 publication, ''Public disclosures can help build trust by providing transparency and assurance around how boards are fulfilling their cybersecurity risk oversight responsibilities.'' Investors and customers deserve a clear understanding of whether publicly traded companies are prioritizing cybersecurity and have the capacity to protect investors and customers from cyber related attacks. Our legislation aims to provide a better understanding of these issues through improved SEC disclosures.

While this legislation is a matter for consideration by the Banking Committee, of which I am a member, this bill is also informed by my service on the Armed Services Committee and the Select Committee on Intelligence. Through this Banking-Armed Services-Intelligence perspective, I see that our economic security is indeed a matter of our national security, and this is particularly the case as the pandemic has forced many of us to be ever more dependent on technology and the Internet.

Indeed, General Darren W. McDew, the former Commander of U.S. Transportation Command, which is charged with moving our military assets to meet our national security objectives in partnership with the private sector, offered several sobering assessments during an April 10, 2018 hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee. He stated that ''cyber is the number one threat to U.S. Transportation Command, but I believe it is the number one threat to the Nation . . . in our headquarters, cyber is the commander's business, but not everywhere across our Country is cyber a CEO's business . . . in our cyber roundtables, which is one of the things we are doing to raise our level of awareness, some of the CEO's chief security officers cannot even get to see the board, they cannot even . . . see the CEO. So that is a problem.''

With growing cyber threats that have resulted in serious breaches, we all need to be more proactive in ensuring our Nation's cybersecurity. This legislation seeks to take one step towards that goal by encouraging publicly traded companies to be more transparent to their investors and customers on whether and how their Boards of Directors and senior management are prioritizing cybersecurity.

I thank the bill's supporters, including the North American Securities Administrators Association, the Council of Institutional Investors, the National Association of State Treasurers, the California Public Employees' Retirement System, the Bipartisan Policy Center, MIT Professor Simon Johnson, Columbia Law Professor Jack Coffee, the Consumer Federation of America, and Rhode Island General Treasurer Seth Magaziner, and I urge our colleagues to join in supporting this legislation.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 119—ESTABLISHING THE CONGRESSIONAL GOLD STAR FAMILY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR THE PLACEMENT IN OFFICES OF SENATORS OF CHILDREN, SPOUSES, AND SIBLINGS OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WHO ARE HOSTILE CASUALTIES OR WHO HAVE DIED FROM A TRAINING-RELATED INJURY

Mrs. BLACKBURN (for herself, Mr. CRAMER, Mr. CRAPO, Ms. ERNST, Mr. HAGERTY, Ms. HASSAN, Mr. SCOTT of Florida, Ms. SINEMA, and Mr. WICKER) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Rules and Administration:

S. RES. 119

Resolved,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This resolution may be cited as the ''SFC Sean Cooley and SPC Christopher Horton Congressional Gold Star Family Fellowship Program Resolution''.

SEC. 2. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD STAR FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.

(a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section—

(1) the term ''eligible individual'' means an individual who is the child (including a stepchild), spouse, or sibling of a member of the Armed Forces who is a hostile casualty or died from a training-related injury;

(2) the terms ''hostile casualty'' and ''training-related injury'' have the meanings given those terms in section 2402(b) of title 38, United States Code; and

(3) the term ''Program'' means the Congressional Gold Star Family Fellowship Program established under subsection (b).

(b) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the Senate the Congressional Gold Star Family Fellowship Program, under which an eligible individual may serve a 12-month fellowship in the office of a Senator.

(c) DIRECTION OF PROGRAM.—The Program shall be carried out under the direction of the Secretary of the Senate.

(d) PLACEMENT IN DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICE OR A STATE OFFICE.—An individual may serve a fellowship under the Program at the office of a Senator in the District of Columbia or an office of the Senator in the State the Senator represents.

(e) REGULATIONS.—The Program shall be carried out in accordance with regulations promulgated by the Committee on Rules and Administration of the Senate.

SENATE RESOLUTION 120—RECOGNIZING THE NINTH SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS AND REAFFIRMING THE COMMITMENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO A MORE PROSPEROUS, SECURE, AND DEMOCRATIC WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Mr. RISCH (for himself, Mr. MENENDEZ, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. KAINE, and Mr. CASSIDY) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 120

Whereas the United States has pursued multiple collaborative initiatives to advance the region's enduring and shared interest in a more secure, prosperous, and democratic Western Hemisphere;

Whereas the United States will host the Ninth Summit of the Americas for the first time since it hosted the inaugural Summit in Miami, Florida in 1994;

Whereas, since 1994, the Summit of the Americas is a valuable forum for democratically elected heads of state and governments of the Western Hemisphere to discuss common policy issues, affirm shared values, and commit to concerted actions at the national and regional level to address the novel and existing challenges facing the Americas;

Whereas the First and Second Summits of the Americas advanced commitments to lower trade barriers, improve transparency and market access, and facilitate economic integration, and, following those Summits, the United States has signed free trade agreements with 12 of the 35 countries in the region;

Whereas, since 2018, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Panama, Suriname, and Uruguay have signed Memorandums of Understanding with the United States under the America Crece Program to leverage private investment in energy and infrastructure projects and advance economic prosperity, security, and good governance;

Whereas, during the 2018 Summit of the Americas, the United States announced additional humanitarian assistance for Venezuelans who have fled their country as a result of the political, economic, and security crises created by the regime of Nicolás Maduro, including support for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) response to assist Venezuelan refugees in Colombia and Brazil;

Whereas Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) and their involvement in money laundering and the trafficking of people, narcotics, and weapons in the region pose complex transnational threats to United States public health and national security, as well as the stability of the Americas, by undermining citizen security, basic human rights, the rule of law, good governance, and economic development;

Whereas the United States has sought to improve regional security through friendly and sustained relationships that build interoperability, readiness, and capability with regional security partners, including through programs such as Plan Colombia, the Merida Initiative, the Central America Regional Security Initiative (CARSI), and the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI);

Whereas the pandemic caused by coronavirus disease 2019 (commonly referred to as ''COVID–19'') has had devastating health and socioeconomic consequences for the states and peoples of the Americas that have—

(1) overwhelmed health systems;

(2) led to the worsening of economic conditions and contraction of gross domestic product per capita;

(3) led to an increase in unemployment, especially for individuals working in small- and medium-size businesses and large informal sectors across the region, and a rise in the number of people living in poverty; and

(4) created conditions that have strengthened the illicit activities of criminal organizations;

Whereas the United States Government remains deeply concerned about the negative, often predatory effects of China's growing political, economic, military, and technological influence throughout the region, including significant illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing activities in the Southern Atlantic Ocean and Eastern Pacific Ocean and opaque infrastructure investments that impose unsustainable financial burdens on recipient countries, enable corruption, and undermine good governance;

Whereas the United States Government is deeply concerned about the Government of the Russian Federation's employment of a wide array of diplomatic, military, intelligence, cyber, misinformation, and commercial tools to undermine democratic systems in the region, including through its deepening political, economic, and security support for the Maduro regime in Venezuela;

Whereas the United States Government is deeply concerned about efforts by the Government of Iran to expand its political, economic, and security presence in the region, including through its deepening ties with the Maduro regime in Venezuela;

Whereas the regimes of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, Miguel Díaz-Canel in Cuba, and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua, have systematically eroded democratic institutions, commit widespread human rights violations, draw lessons from one another to sharpen state-sponsored repression and internal control mechanisms, and receive the support of malign state and non-state actors, which pose a challenge to United States national security and national interests;

Whereas entrenched corruption, linkages between transnational criminal organizations and political actors, and the harassment and murder of journalists, human rights defenders, environmental activists, and civil society leaders in Latin America and the Caribbean weaken citizens' confidence in democracy and negatively affect United States national interests; and

Whereas weak rule of law, elevated levels of criminal violence, and systemic corruption in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras fuel irregular migration that affects regional stability: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) commemorates the occasion of the United States hosting the Ninth Summit of the Americas;

(2) reaffirms the commitment of the United States to promote economic prosperity, security, and democratic governance throughout the Americas; and

(3) calls on the President to lead a strong and coordinated diplomatic effort during the Summit process to ensure the Ninth Summit of the Americas—

(A) strengthens democratic governance by building on the 2018 Lima Commitment to—

(i) reduce bureaucracy;

(ii) strengthen the independence of judiciaries;

(iii) increase transparency through the use of new technologies;

(iv) encourage private sector participation in the formulation of public anti-corruption policies;

(v) protect whistleblowers, journalists, and law enforcement officials;

(vi) work towards preventing regional financial systems from being used to transfer and conceal illicit funds; and

(vii) identify resources to strengthen hemispheric anticorruption mechanisms;

(B) strengthens post-COVID–19 pandemic economic recovery efforts by outlining specific commitments to deepen trade and investment integration throughout the Americas and pursuing effective nearshoring and reshoring initiatives;

(C) builds upon United States efforts to enhance the institutional capacity and technical capabilities of partner countries to strengthen the rule of law, civilian security, respect of human rights, and government transparency;

(D) builds upon United States efforts to enhance regional cooperation to disrupt, degrade, and dismantle malign state and non-state influences, including transnational organized criminal networks, and terrorist organizations;

(E) reinforces the capacity of member states to—

(i) implement actions and initiatives in support of peaceful and democratic efforts of the people of Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, who desire to hold free and fair elections and restore democratic order and the rule of law in their respective countries; and

(ii) support the people of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras as they strive to address weak democratic governance and the elevated levels of corruption, violence, and criminality that drive irregular migration; and

(F) explores a comprehensive approach to forced displacement and migration challenges in the Western Hemisphere, takes stock of humanitarian crises and flashpoints in the region, and mobilizes member state commitments to advocate for and support multilateral humanitarian and development responses.

SENATE RESOLUTION 121—HONORING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF GEORGE DANIEL CROWE

Mr. BRAUN (for himself, Mr. YOUNG, Mr. BROWN, Ms. WARREN, and Mr. MARKEY) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 121

Whereas George Daniel Crowe (referred to in this preamble as ''Mr. Crowe'')—

(1) was an extraordinary athlete;

(2) excelled at both basketball and baseball; and

(3) holds the rare status of having played both basketball and baseball at the professional level;

Whereas Mr. Crowe was born in Whiteland, Indiana, on March 22, 1921;

Whereas Mr. Crowe was raised in nearby Franklin, Indiana, where he was a standout on the football, baseball, and basketball teams;

Whereas Mr. Crowe led his basketball team to the 1939 Indiana State championship game, where, although his team lost to Frankfort High School, Mr. Crowe displayed his talents to a State-wide audience and became the first player to ever earn the prestigious distinction of Indiana Mr. Basketball;

Whereas Mr. Crowe earned an athletic scholarship to attend Indiana Central College, known today as the University of Indianapolis, where he played basketball, baseball, and ran track;

Whereas higher education was rare for an African American in the 1930s and 1940s, and Mr. Crowe took advantage of the opportunity to be a student athlete and graduated in 1943;

Whereas, after graduation, Mr. Crowe entered the Army during World War II and served the United States admirably until 1946;

Whereas, following his service to the United States in World War II, Mr. Crowe began playing professional basketball on a series of Negro League basketball teams between 1946 and 1953, including the Los Angeles Red Devils and the New York Renaissance (commonly known as the ''Harlem Renaissance'');

Whereas, in 1947, Mr. Crowe joined the New York Black Yankees, which was a baseball team in the Negro Leagues;

Whereas, after joining the New York Black Yankees, Mr. Crowe played 2 professional sports simultaneously;

Whereas, in 1949, 2 years after Jackie Robinson integrated Major League baseball, Mr. Crowe was picked up by the Minor League Hartford Chiefs, where he won the batting title with a .353 average;

Whereas Mr. Crowe was called up by the Boston Braves in 1952 and played in the Major Leagues for 9 years on that team, the Cincinnati Redlegs, and the St. Louis Cardinals;

Whereas, during his Major League baseball career, Mr. Crowe played primarily as a first baseman and a pinch hitter;

Whereas, upon his retirement from Major League baseball, Mr. Crowe held the Major League record of 14 career pinch hit home runs and had a .990 fielding percentage;

Whereas the most successful period of Mr. Crowe's career in the Major Leagues was in 1957, when he hit 31 home runs, and 1958, when he was selected as a National League All Star;

Whereas Mr. Crowe also played winter baseball for the Santurce Crabbers in the Puerto Rico baseball league;

Whereas Mr. Crowe and his teammates on the Santurce Crabbers, who included Willie Mays and Roberto Clemente, won the Caribbean World Series;

Whereas Mr. Crowe was a pioneer in civil rights and quietly but firmly paved the way for wider opportunities in society in the United States by proving his ability as an athlete and student in college and as a professional athlete;

Whereas, in 1946, soon after his discharge from the Army, Mr. Crowe forced the integration of the movie theater in Franklin, Indiana, when he refused to leave his seat on the main floor and move to the designated Negro section in the back of the theater;

Whereas the prominence of Mr. Crowe in the Franklin, Indiana, community and his service in World War II, which was a war against fascism, led the movie theater to be permanently integrated 1 week after Mr. Crowe refused to leave his seat; and

Whereas, after his retirement from professional sports, Mr. Crowe began new careers as an insurance salesman and then a school teacher in New York: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That—

(1) George Daniel Crowe—

(A) achieved a rarely matched record of athletic excellence at the high school, collegiate, and professional levels; and

(B) set an example for all Hoosiers and people of the United States—

(i) with his dogged determination and hard work;

(ii) by taking advantage of opportunities as they arose; and

(iii) by making the careers of countless people of the United States who followed him possible;

(2) the story of George Daniel Crowe is—

(A) the story of the United States in the 20th century;

(B) a story of overcoming oppression;

(C) a story of demanding what President Lincoln called the ''Right to Rise'';

(D) a story of developing talent and achieving greatness through hard work; and

(E) a story of trying to leave the world a better place than he found it; and

(3) on March 22, 2021, which is the 100th anniversary of his birth, the Senate recognizes George Daniel Crowe as—

(A) a great Hoosier;

(B) a man of respect and achievement; and

(C) a man whose example can help guide the people of the United States.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 1400. Mr. PADILLA (for Mr. TESTER (for himself and Mr. MORAN)) proposed an amendment to the bill H.R. 1276, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish COVID–19 vaccines to certain individuals, and for other purposes.

TEXT OF AMENDMENTS

SA 1400. Mr. PADILLA (for Mr. TESTER (for himself and Mr. MORAN)) proposed an amendment to the bill H.R. 1276, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish COVID–19 vaccines to certain individuals, and for other purposes; as follows:

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse Act'' or the ''SAVE LIVES Act''.

SEC. 2. AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO FURNISH COVID–19 VACCINE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS NOT ENROLLED IN PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may furnish a vaccine for COVID–19 to a covered individual during the COVID–19 public health emergency.

(b) PRIORITIZATION.—In furnishing vaccines for COVID–19 under the laws administered by the Secretary, the Secretary shall—

(1) prioritize the vaccination of veterans who are enrolled in the patient enrollment system, veterans who receive hospital care and medical services pursuant to subsection (c)(2) of section 1705 of title 38, United States Code, and accompanying caregivers of such veterans before the vaccination of covered individuals not otherwise described in this paragraph; and

(2) only furnish vaccines for COVID–19 to covered individuals under this section to the extent that such vaccines are available.

(c) TIMING OF VACCINES PROVIDED TO SPOUSES OF VETERANS.—The Secretary may determine the timing for offering a vaccine for COVID–19 to the spouse of a veteran from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(d) VACCINE ALLOCATION.—It is the sense of Congress that, to the extent practicable based on the current national supply chain, the Secretary of Health and Human Services should adjust the allocation for the Department of Veterans Affairs for the vaccine for COVID–19 based on the additional eligibility of covered individuals under this section.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) ACCOMPANYING CAREGIVER.—The term ''accompanying caregiver'' means a caregiver described in subparagraph (D), (E), or (F) of paragraph (2) who is accompanying a veteran who is receiving a vaccine for COVID–19 furnished by the Department.

(2) COVERED INDIVIDUAL.—The term ''covered individual'' means any of the following individuals:

(A) A veteran who is not eligible to enroll in the patient enrollment system.

(B) A veteran who is eligible for care under section 1724 of title 38, United States Code.

(C) A beneficiary under section 1781 of such title.

(D) A family caregiver of a veteran participating in the program of comprehensive assistance for family caregivers under section 1720G(a) of such title.

(E) A caregiver of a veteran participating in the program of general caregiver support services under section 1720G(b) of such title.

(F) A caregiver of a veteran participating in the Medical Foster Home Program, Bowel and Bladder Program, Home Based Primary Care Program, or Veteran Directed Care Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(G) A spouse of a veteran.

(3) COVERED PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.—The term ''covered public health emergency'' means an emergency with respect to COVID–19 declared by a Federal, State, or local authority.

(4) COVID–19.—The term ''COVID–19'' means the coronavirus disease 2019.

(5) PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM.—The term ''patient enrollment system'' means the system of annual patient enrollment of the Department of Veterans Affairs established and operated under section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.

(6) VETERAN.—The term ''veteran'' has the meaning given that term in section 101(2) of title 38, United States Code.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I have 8 requests for committees to meet during today's session of the Senate. They have the approval of the Majority and Minority leaders.

Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a), of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following committees are authorized to meet during today's session of the Senate:

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

The Committee on Finance is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

The Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 9:30 a.m., to conduct a hearing on nominations.

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 9:30 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WATER, AND WILDLIFE

The Subcommittee on Fisheries, Water, and Wildlife of the Committee

on Environment and Public Works is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, March 17, 2021, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

DISCHARGE AND REFERRAL—S. 344

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs be discharged from further consideration of S. 344 and it be referred to the Committee on Armed Services.

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

HONORING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF GEORGE DANIEL CROWE

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 121, submitted earlier today.

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

The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 121) honoring the 100th anniversary of the birth of George Daniel Crowe.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 121) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in the RECORD of March 17, 2021, (Legislative Day of March 16, 2021) under ''Submitted Resolutions.'')

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS VETERANS' AND CAREGIVERS' COVID–19 IMMUNIZATIONS NOW EXPANDED ACT OF 2021

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 1276, which was received from the House and is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1276) to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to furnish COVID–19 vaccines to certain individuals, and for other purposes.

There being no objection the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. PADILLA. I ask unanimous consent that the Tester-Moran substitute amendment be considered and agreed to.

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

The amendment (No. 1400), in the nature of a substitute, was agreed to as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the ''Strengthening and Amplifying Vaccination Efforts to Locally Immunize All Veterans and Every Spouse Act'' or the ''SAVE LIVES Act''.

SEC. 2. AUTHORITY OF SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO FURNISH COVID–19 VACCINE TO CERTAIN INDIVIDUALS NOT ENROLLED IN PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may furnish a vaccine for COVID–19 to a covered individual during the COVID–19 public health emergency.

(b) PRIORITIZATION.—In furnishing vaccines for COVID–19 under the laws administered by the Secretary, the Secretary shall—

(1) prioritize the vaccination of veterans who are enrolled in the patient enrollment system, veterans who receive hospital care and medical services pursuant to subsection (c)(2) of section 1705 of title 38, United States Code, and accompanying caregivers of such veterans before the vaccination of covered individuals not otherwise described in this paragraph; and

(2) only furnish vaccines for COVID–19 to covered individuals under this section to the extent that such vaccines are available.

(c) TIMING OF VACCINES PROVIDED TO SPOUSES OF VETERANS.—The Secretary may determine the timing for offering a vaccine for COVID–19 to the spouse of a veteran from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(d) VACCINE ALLOCATION.—It is the sense of Congress that, to the extent practicable based on the current national supply chain, the Secretary of Health and Human Services should adjust the allocation for the Department of Veterans Affairs for the vaccine for COVID–19 based on the additional eligibility of covered individuals under this section.

(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) ACCOMPANYING CAREGIVER.—The term ''accompanying caregiver'' means a caregiver described in subparagraph (D), (E), or (F) of paragraph (2) who is accompanying a veteran who is receiving a vaccine for COVID–19 furnished by the Department.

(2) COVERED INDIVIDUAL.—The term ''covered individual'' means any of the following individuals:

(A) A veteran who is not eligible to enroll in the patient enrollment system.

(B) A veteran who is eligible for care under section 1724 of title 38, United States Code.

(C) A beneficiary under section 1781 of such title.

(D) A family caregiver of a veteran participating in the program of comprehensive assistance for family caregivers under section 1720G(a) of such title.

(E) A caregiver of a veteran participating in the program of general caregiver support services under section 1720G(b) of such title.

(F) A caregiver of a veteran participating in the Medical Foster Home Program, Bowel and Bladder Program, Home Based Primary Care Program, or Veteran Directed Care Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(G) A spouse of a veteran.

(3) COVERED PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY.—The term ''covered public health emergency'' means an emergency with respect to COVID–19 declared by a Federal, State, or local authority.

(4) COVID–19.—The term ''COVID–19'' means the coronavirus disease 2019.

(5) PATIENT ENROLLMENT SYSTEM.—The term ''patient enrollment system'' means the system of annual patient enrollment of the Department of Veterans Affairs established and operated under section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.

(6) VETERAN.—The term ''veteran'' has the meaning given that term in section 101(2) of title 38, United States Code.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

Mr. PADILLA. I know of no further debate on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there further debate on the bill?

Hearing none, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 1276), as amended, was passed.

Mr. PADILLA. I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m. Thursday, March 18; that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day and morning business be closed; that upon the conclusion of morning business, the Senate proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the nomination of Xavier Becerra to be Secretary for Health and Human Services; further, that the postcloture debate time on the Becerra nomination expire at 12 noon; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; finally, that upon disposition of the Becerra nomination, the Senate resume consideration of the nomination of Martin Walsh to be Secretary of Labor and that the cloture motion with respect to the Walsh nomination ripen at 1:30 p.m.

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

Mr. PADILLA. Finally, for the information of Senators, we expect two rollcall votes during Thursday's session of the Senate in relation to the Becerra and Walsh nominations.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 6:22 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, March 18, 2021, at 10 a.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

JOSE W. FERNANDEZ, OF NEW YORK, TO BE UNITED STATES ALTERNATE GOVERNOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT FOR A TERM OF FIVE YEARS; UNITED STATES ALTERNATE GOVERNOR OF THE INTER–AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK FOR A TERM OF FIVE YEARS, VICE KEITH KRACH.

EUROPEAN BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT

JOSE W. FERNANDEZ, OF NEW YORK, TO BE UNITED STATES ALTERNATE GOVERNOR OF THE EUROPEAN BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT, VICE KEITH KRACH.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

JOSE W. FERNANDEZ, OF NEW YORK, TO BE AN UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE (ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT), VICE KEITH KRACH.

CONFIRMATION

Executive nomination confirmed by the Senate March 17, 2021:

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

KATHERINE C. TAI, OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, TO BE UNITED STATES TRADE REPRESENTATIVE, WITH THE RANK OF AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY.