boundaries of what can be said without the threat of reprisal.''

Well, you can guess what happened next. The grievance industrial complex came after the letter itself. The authors were accused of advancing bigotry and the cycle of nonsense started all over again.

The United States of America needs free speech. We need free expression. And all of us, from all perspectives, need the courage to speak up and defend it.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 4049, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 4049) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Inhofe amendment No. 2301, in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell (for Portman) amendment No. 2080 (to amendment No. 2301), to require an element in annual reports on cyber science and technology activities on work with academic consortia on high priority cybersecurity research activities in Department of Defense capabilities.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, Democrat Senators returned to Washington on Monday prepared to work in a bipartisan way on the next phase of coronavirus relief.

After stalling for months while COVID–19 surged in more than 40 States, Senate Republicans finally said that now—the end of July, more than 3 months after the CARES Act passed—would be the time for another emergency bill. But here we are. It is in the middle of the week, and the Republican Party is so disorganized, chaotic, and unprepared that they can barely cobble together a partisan bill in their own conference.

Indicative was Leader MCCONNELL's speech. He rants and raves about the New York Times and cancel culture, but there is not a word about COVID. People are ready to lose their unemployment benefits, to lose their apartments and be evicted. Local governments are laying off people because they don't have the dollars. We are in a national crisis.

We don't hear a word out of Leader MCCONNELL as we are on the edge of so many cliffs. Instead, there is lots of talk about the New York Times and cancel culture. That may be fodder for the far right. That is not what America needs.

When Leader MCCONNELL, at this crucial moment, can't even mention COVID–19, it shows what a knot the Republicans are tied in. The bottom line is this: The White House Chief of Staff said Republicans ''were on their own 20 yard line'' when it comes to their legislative proposal—their own 20-yard line, 2 months and a week after we passed the COVID 3 bill, after millions more Americans applied for unemployment, after many small businesses went under, and many more died and were hospitalized as COVID–19 rages in many Southern States. We are still on the 20-yard line? Where have the Republicans been?

I have never seen a political party in the middle of a crisis so tied in a knot that the majority leader can't even mention it in his speech and spends time ranting against favorite targets of the far right and can't come up with a proposal.

This is not a game. This isn't typical Republican dysfunction about whether or not they did or didn't see the President's last tweet. The disarray on the Republican side has real consequences. Americans will suffer unnecessary pain and uncertainty because of it.

The only reason there hasn't been another relief package in Congress already is due to this Republican incompetence and reckless delay. Even after all of these months, the White House and Senate Republicans are starkly divided about what to do. The White House is insisting on policies, like a payroll tax cut, that would do nothing to help millions of unemployed Americans and that many Senate Republicans don't even support. The Republicans can't even seem to agree on whether to provide any new aid for State and local governments or if the States should be able to more flexibly use the support we have already given.

A few of my friends on the other side of the aisle hardly want to spend any more money to help our country in this once-in-a-generation crisis because it might add to the national debt. Giant corporate tax cuts—$1.5 trillion to $2 trillion of them—are OK, but fighting the greatest public health crisis in a century and forestalling a depression is a bridge too far? Where are the priorities on the other side of the aisle? I guess they are for helping big corporate fat cats—wealthy people—but not average people who are hurting. That is the trouble with the Republican Party.

Seriously, there are only 3 weeks left until the August work period, and the Republicans are still in the opening phases of preparing their bill. We don't have time for this mess that the Republicans are in. The moratorium on evictions that we passed in the CARES Act expires in 2 days. The Wall Street Journal reports that nearly 12 million adults live in households that missed their last rent payments and that 23 million have little or no confidence in their ability to make the next ones.

Next week, the enhanced unemployment benefits we passed in the CARES Act will expire while 20 to 30 million Americans will still be without work. A recent study showed that those enhanced benefits prevented nearly 12 million Americans from slipping into poverty—12 million. Yet, because the Republicans can't get their act together, those benefits might expire next week.

Congress needs to act quickly. The Senate Republicans and the White House need to get on the same page, produce a proposal—not just drop it on the floor but start negotiations. Better yet, we could start negotiations on the Heroes Act, which already passed the House, and, unlike the developing Republican proposal, it would actually match the scale of this crisis.

Speaker PELOSI and I met yesterday with Chief of Staff Meadows and Secretary Mnuchin. Even with all of this chaos, we have had some indications about what the Republicans are trying to do in their bill. Over the weekend, we heard that the administration was trying to block additional funding for coronavirus testing and contact tracing. President Trump has also ended the CDC's data collection efforts, potentially risking access to data that public health experts so vitally need. So, when we met with Chief of Staff Meadows and Secretary Mnuchin, Speaker PELOSI and I told them to back off these counterproductive and dangerous ideas.

In addition, we will be sending a letter to the administration to demand answers on how data is being reported to the White House, as well as pushing for legislation in the upcoming bill to ensure that COVID–19 data is fully transparent and accessible without there being any interference from the administration.

We know Donald Trump likes to hide the truth. He thinks, when the truth doesn't come forward and when he muzzles government officials, that it changes things. It doesn't. The virus still rages and will rage unless we do something about it, not simply hide the statistics that show his depth in mendacity. We will make sure that those statistics are made public so all of America, including the President, will know how bad the situation is, because that is what we need—the truth to set us free and then to act on it. Let me repeat: If the administration refuses to reverse course, the Democrats will insist on data transparency in the next COVID relief bill.

All of our efforts to bolster the economy, help the unemployed, save small businesses, and ensure our children are safe at school will be meaningless if we don't stop the spread of the virus. Hiding COVID data from the CDC, as well as foot-dragging on more testing and tracing, is absolutely incomprehensible and imperils everything else we are working on. So we need to make a law, and we need to make it soon. Right now, the infighting and partisanship on the Republican side and cockamamie ideas, like hiding data from the CDC, are only adding to the delay.

We also saw the return of President Trump's coronavirus press briefings yesterday. It is remarkable that President Trump has lowered the bar so much that his performance yesterday was seen as a change in tone. It is a very sad state of affairs in our country when one day of the President's reading statistics is hailed as leadership when that is what he should have been doing all along. The mere acknowledgment by the President that COVID–19 is raging through our country is some kind of breakthrough. Is that what people believe? Is that what Trump wants the people to believe? It is crazy.

The truth is, every time the President takes the podium, he is a risk to public health. We are 6 months into the coronavirus, and the President has only just come around to the idea that wearing masks would be a good idea. He deserves criticism for that belated admission, not praise. We are 6 months into the crisis, and the President said yesterday that his administration is in the process of developing a strategy that is going to be very, very powerful—6 months in. Countries in Europe and East Asia developed national testing regimens ages ago. That is why they are way ahead of us in fighting this crisis.

Americans must be hanging their heads in shame and disbelief that this administration is still trying to sort out the basics. Then, when he says he is going to try and sort out the basics months and months too late, as the crisis has raged, people think he should get praise? No, he should be criticized because he hasn't done what he was supposed to have been doing for months.

President Trump started his press conference by labeling COVID–19 the ''China virus,'' which shows the President is still trying to deflect blame and play political games with this deadly, serious virus—games that are divisive. The truth is, more than anything or anybody else, the responsibility for America's failure to deal competently with COVID–19 falls squarely on President Trump's shoulders. It is long past time for the President to start acting like it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I read this morning that more Americans have died in the last 3 months than in any 3-month period in the history of the United States. That is a stunning statistic. We are searching the records to make sure that it is an accurate statement, and I am afraid it is.

So far, we believe 140,000 Americans have died of this COVID–19 crisis that we are facing. This is not a moment of American greatness. They have just done a review of the nations across the world and the safety of living in those nations that face this pandemic. Where does the United States rank among the nations of the world in terms of safety in dealing with the coronavirus? It ranks 58th—two ranks ahead of Russia.

How could we have reached this moment in time when this pandemic has been so devastating in the United States, more so than in many other countries around the world—countries that are supposedly not even close to us in terms of economic development and strength? They have handled this far better than the United States. Yet what are we doing about it now? It is a valid question.

I know that the President has decided he doesn't want the likes of Dr. Tony Fauci by his side any longer when it comes to talking about this pandemic, but Dr. Fauci and Dr. Collins, of the National Institutes of Health, were interviewed over the weekend and were asked directly about the issue of testing.

Why does it take so long in the United States to get results, and what kind of problems does that create?

Well, we know. If people suspect they are positive for this virus and go in for a test, they are worried that they may be endangering their own lives, not to mention the lives of others. Then, they have to wait 1 day, 2 days, 3 days, 6 days—more—for the test results. That is unacceptable. We need to invest more money in testing and more money in finding tests to provide quicker results.

You would think that it would be obvious to everyone, but it is not obvious in this negotiation that is taking place now in the U.S. Senate. There are Republican Senators who are resisting the idea of putting more money into testing in the United States. What country do they live in? Do they ever go home from Washington to see what is happening in the rest of this country? We closed down the testing facilities in my hometown of Springfield, IL, this last week. It was disappointing, for we needed it, and we need more.

If we are serious about opening this economy, if we are serious about stopping the spread of this pandemic, and if we are serious about opening our schools and making certain that teachers and pupils are safe, we need more testing. Yet here we are, tied in knots, as Senator SCHUMER said earlier.

The Republicans can't agree among themselves about the issue of putting money into testing in the midst of this pandemic. It is hard to believe. It was more than 2 months ago that the House of Representatives passed the Heroes Act. Senator MCCONNELL has come to the floor regularly to ridicule that effort because he doesn't like the provisions in the act. It is his right to have a difference of opinion, but the obvious questions to Senator MCCONNELL are these: Where is your alternative? What have you been doing for the last 2 months? You should have been writing a bill that we should be voting on as soon as we finish the one that is pending on the floor.

Apparently, the White House and the Senate Republicans can't come to any agreement about how to move forward. There are some who are basically saying: Enough. We are not going to spend another penny. We are not going to waste any more money on any type of COVID–19.

I have seen their testimony. I have seen their statements before the microphones. That is hard to imagine.

I wonder if some of the Senators from States like Kentucky and Texas who have stepped up and said, ''We have spent enough money on this,'' have been home recently. Have they been there to meet people who are unemployed, out of work, or who have been laid off who are receiving the Federal unemployment benefits to keep bread on the table and to pay for the their mortgages and their health insurance?

This $600 a week may sound like a pretty generous amount of money to some. Try living on it. Try living on $600 a week when it costs you $400 a week for health insurance. Yes, that is the average on COBRA premiums—almost $1,700 a month. So, when you talk about $600 a week, take out $1,600 or $1,700 off the top of that, and tell me what is left to take care of your family.

As for the last Federal unemployment payment under the CARES Act, Senator SCHUMER is right. It ends on July 31—a week from Saturday. We have been told that the last checks will be mailed this Saturday, which is just a few days from now.

Three days from now, the last check goes out. While that check is making its way through the mail, is it even possible that the Republican leadership, with the White House, will come up with a proposal to deal with this? It has been 2 months. Senator MCCONNELL said, during those 2 months, that he didn't feel any sense of urgency—no sense of urgency. Can you imagine the sense of urgency if you can't make your mortgage payment? Can you imagine the sense of urgency if that utility bill is so large you can't pay it? That is the reality facing a lot of families who have been laid off and are unemployed. I believe—and many agree—that one of our highest priorities is to make sure that the resources are there for the families.

I also want to say that we are in the midst of this conversation about public health while the President and his party are trying to kill the Affordable Care Act in the Supreme Court. More

than 140,000 Americans have died from this pandemic, and President Trump and the Republican Party are trying to kill the major source of health insurance for millions of Americans. For 10 years, the Affordable Care Act has been the law of the land, and before it was the law of the land, there were some things going on when it came to health insurance which we should not forget.

Routinely, health insurance companies discriminated against women before we passed the Affordable Care Act and prohibited their practices. There was a time when insurance companies were allowed to charge women more than men for the same health insurance policies. It was common for women to pay three or four times what men pay for on the identical plans.

Important women's healthcare was often excluded from most insurance plans. For instance, most individual policies refused to cover maternity or newborn care.

Insurance companies were allowed to deny coverage and charge higher premiums to Americans with preexisting conditions. That particular discrimination hurt women much more than men. Approximately 24 million American men have preexisting conditions; 30 million American women.

Insurance companies could consider a host of medical conditions to be preexisting conditions: breast cancer, C-sections, victims of domestic violence, asthma, acne, heart disease—all preexisting conditions. Before the Affordable Care Act, that is what the health insurance companies pointed to when they charged women and others more because of it.

The Affordable Care Act put an end to that, and now the Republicans want to put an end to the Affordable Care Act. Well, you must say, they must have a much better idea. There must be a Republican proposal out there far better than the Affordable Care Act. There isn't. We haven't seen any. They have no alternative. They just want to kill anything that might have the name ''Obama'' on it.

We have to do something about this to protect health insurance for the future, and the notion that the Republicans and President Trump are fighting the Supreme Court to eliminate the Affordable Care Act in this moment in American history, when we are fighting this pandemic, is impossible to explain.

AMENDMENT NO. 1788

Madam President, I have been honored to work on the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee since December of 2012, when Senator Dan Inouye, the legendary Senator from Hawaii and recipient of a Congressional Medal of Honor, passed away. Since I have taken that job, I have been impressed many times over by the extraordinary Department of Defense and the actions they have taken—the development of technology like GPS, investing in critical medical research, and the abiding commitment to women and men in uniform, who make so many great sacrifices for our country. But I have also discovered at the same time how poorly we manage the Department of Defense. Our procurement system seems designed to generate redtape, delays, and cost overruns. Our top adversaries around the world develop game-changing technologies at a fraction of the cost that it takes us to develop them.

There is going to be an amendment on the floor today about future spending in the Department of Defense offered by Senator SANDERS. I heard what Senator MCCONNELL had to say about it earlier. He seems to believe that any suggestion that there is misspending in the Department of Defense is not patriotic. Somehow you are a chicken if you raise any questions about waste in the Department of Defense. I couldn't disagree more.

The Sanders amendment proposes a 10-percent budget cut in the Department of Defense. Well, I have taken a look, as others have, at the failed audits, the cost overruns, and the sclerotic bureaucracy at the Department of Defense. I believe the American taxpayer deserves more.

One of my early hearings in the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee focused on the defense industrial base and the threat of sequestration. The lives of our servicemembers often depend on the equipment and training provided. When managed well, the defense industrial base generates the best equipment, next-generation technology, good jobs, and powerful weapons. However, I am concerned that holding defense contractors accountable for poor performance has not been the priority it should be today.

Listen to this: From 2016 to 2019, military spending rose by 18 percent. During the same period of time, the Department of Defense accumulated $18 billion in cost overruns for weapons programs. What about the contractors who generated those cost overruns? The top five defense contractors in America saw their profits increase by 44 percent in that same period. This doesn't add up.

Businesses have the right to earn a profit, but taxpayers have the right to demand accountability. With defense spending on such a steep rise, we should be driven by the motto ''pay for performance.'' I don't believe that is the culture at the Department of Defense today.

Senator SANDERS wants to direct $74 billion to communities across the country—including many needy communities in my State of Illinois—for housing, healthcare, childcare, education, and jobs. Senator MCCONNELL comes to the floor and calls that socialism. Socialism when it comes to education and childcare? I don't agree with him.

There is considerable merit to what Senator SANDERS has to say about the run-up in cost at the Department of Defense, but I do not agree with his basic approach of across-the-board cuts. When you start exempting things like military pay and healthcare, it means the remaining items take a deeper hit.

The 14-percent cut that has been proposed for the remaining items at the Department of Defense would be a hard hit, no question about it. As I have said many times, sequestration didn't work, and we ought to learn a lesson from it.

The National Guard should not have a 14-percent cut. Special victims counsels and sexual assault prevention programs should not be cut by 14 percent. Cleaning up PFAS contamination at military bases should not be cut by 14 percent. Instead, we ought to look at the Department of Defense budget more carefully, not with an across-the-board cut.

Let's start with the $16 billion OCO gimmick. OCO is the account created to fight a war. We started this account years and years ago, when we actually were engaged in a war. We have kept it alive to this day because it is a way to escape budget rules.

The OCO gimmick funds were requested for routine Army, Navy, and Air Force operations that have nothing to do with fighting a war in Afghanistan or any other place. The administration requested these funds for the sole purposes of evading the caps on the base defense budget. Beyond that—listen to this—the President of the United States, who is arguing for this budget, was the first to raid it and take $8 billion or more out for his medieval wall on the southern border of the United States.

The $18 billion in weapons systems overruns that I mentioned earlier—what could we do with $18 billion in cost overruns? Well, you could increase the budget for the National Institutes of Health medical research by almost 50 percent. That is one thing. You could provide student loan forgiveness for healthcare workers or hazard pay for these same men and women who risk their lives for us every day.

I have to tell you, there is need for us to look to space in terms of our future defense. I still haven't been sold on this concept of the so-called Space Force. Putting millions of dollars into additional bureaucratic costs is hard for me to understand or explain.

Ultimately, the Sanders amendment is going to be considered in this authorization bill, but if it is going anywhere in concept, it will be in the Appropriations Committee, where I serve. Our work as appropriators is to examine the details of the budget and make the best decisions for the taxpayers and for our national defense.

I believe Senator SANDERS is on the right track to demand accountability and to ask that we find cost overruns and expenditures that can be changed without jeopardizing our national defense. His exact approach is not one that I would endorse, but I have to say that I stand behind his concept that we need to ask harder questions about this massive spending.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I rise to comment, along with my colleague Senator DURBIN, about the Sanders amendment. I must commend how thoughtful and knowledgeable Senator DURBIN is about all these subjects. He has pointed out how there are too many military programs that are not well moderated and that have cost overruns that result in excess cost to the American public. We have to do something about those things, and we also understand that we have huge demand with respect to nondefense spending that we have to meet also.

The Sanders amendment, as Senator DURBIN pointed out, would impose an across-the-board cut to the Department of Defense, except for military personnel accounts and the defense health programs. What he would call a 10-percent across-the-board cut, when you take out health and personnel, becomes really a 14-percent cut to all the accounts at the Department of Defense.

The danger, as so well illustrated by Senator DURBIN, is that this type of indiscriminate getting rid of the good and paying for the bad that doesn't really work. It doesn't make sense. It reminds us all of the battles we had over sequestration, where Departments—not only the Department of Defense but the civilian Departments—had to fund programs because they met the cap and then cut other programs that were much more valuable because they exceeded the cap. That is not a way, as they proverbially say, to run a railroad, nor the Department of Defense.

So we do have to look for specific areas to cut, and, as Senator DURBIN said, a great deal of that is done and will be done in the Appropriations Committee where he is the ranking member. I am a colleague on the committee, and each year we have the challenge of taking the authorization that says ''you may do this'' and actually putting in the money to do it, and that effort is usually valuable, as is the authorization effort, and critically important.

We have to make sure that a result of our deliberations is, first, the resources that are necessary to protect the men and women in the Armed Forces who protect us and also provide for the quality of life of their families and ultimately, of course, that we are able to deter any threat, and if not, defeat that threat decisively.

This is a very important endeavor, and, again, suggesting that we just cut across the board and then put it someplace else is not, I think, commensurate with the kind of approach that we must take and we have to take going forward.

The other factor, too, is that there are real ramifications for this that are not sometimes obvious. There are literally thousands and thousands—not just military personnel but civilian workers and construction workers and equipment manufacturing workers—who, in this indiscriminate, across-the-board cut, would lose their jobs at a time when we can't lose any jobs. This approach would be disruptive. I would not want to make a point to the disadvantage of the thousands and thousands of men and women who are working hard to take care of their families all across this country.

Again, we do have to make serious investments in communities across this country that have been neglected, and I have been consistent in support of those efforts. We do have to make investments in our infrastructure for our economic liability and our economic efficiency. We do have to provide support in many, many different ways that transcends and goes beyond just the Department of Defense. In fact, one could say that just as vital a part of our national defense as our military budget is our education budget and our healthcare budget because our strength is not just military forces; our strength is knowledgeable citizens, our strength is healthy citizens, and our strength is an efficient economic system.

But I think this approach, as I suggested today and I think the suggestion from Senator DURBIN also was that this just across-the-board approach is good for a headline, it is good to make a point, but we are here to make policy, and I hope we do make policy. I hope we can continue in this National Defense Authorization Act to try to argue about issues that people feel are not appropriate spending or if, in fact, we need more spending and that in the appropriations process we will do that once again.

Just as a reminder, this bill adheres to the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2019. It is the final year of the Budget Act. So the numbers we are talking about today for the Department of Defense are not willy-nilly; they were not negotiated without the context of nondefense spending. It was a bipartisan agreement to set the levels of spending for both defense and nondefense, and that is what we are doing here today.

We need a serious discussion about national spending priorities, not just defense spending priorities but priorities that look back to poor communities, industrial policy, infrastructure, education, daycare, the impact of artificial intelligence on the workplace. We have a lot to do, and I think we should get on to doing it but not with the shorthand message of ''let's cut everything here, and put it over there.'' Let's look at the serious issues, and let's confront them, and let's propose serious solutions.

So because of these indiscriminate cuts, I will be forced to oppose this amendment by Senator SANDERS.

There is another amendment that will come before us today proposed by Senator TESTER, and that is one I do support. Senator TESTER's amendment will add additional diseases to those that the Veterans Administration already presumes are the result of exposure to Agent Orange by veterans during their military service in Vietnam.

We know that exposure to the toxic chemical Agent Orange has had severe health consequences for veterans who answered the Nation's call to military service during the Vietnam conflict. Recognizing this, the Veterans Administration already presumes that certain diseases affecting these veterans are service connected as a result of the exposure to Agent Orange. These diseases include non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, soft tissue sarcoma, respiratory cancers, myeloma and type 2 diabetes.

We also know that there are other diseases that are not yet covered and that there are veterans who suffer from these diseases, and this conclusion is supported by a scientific review by the National Academy of Medicine. Parkinson's, bladder cancer, and hypothyroidism should share the same presumption of service connection as the diseases already presumed to be service connected.

Our Vietnam veterans should not have the burden of proving by independent evidence that their diseases were caused by exposure to Agent Orange. The failure to add these conditions to the Veterans Administration's presumptive list continues to deny sick and aging veterans the healthcare and compensation that they have earned through service to our Nation and that they desperately need.

Senator TESTER's amendment begins to remedy this inequity, and I urge all Senators to vote for the Tester amendment.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Alaska.

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, in about an hour we are going to take a vote that our servicemembers around the world will likely be watching. It is a critical vote on the amendment of my colleague from Vermont to blindly cut defense spending, taking a hatchet to the already agreed-upon Bipartisan Budget Act.

We have heard from my colleague JACK REED from Rhode Island, who is part of the strong leadership on the Armed Services Committee and just spoke out against it, and I am going to speak out against it.

I am going to spend some time explaining what this means. This is not just one amendment. This has national implications, and if you are watching in America, I want you to think about what is really going on here.

First of all, my colleague from Vermont says that it is a 10-percent cut, but it is going exempt military personnel and healthcare accounts—which is true as part of the amendment—but it is actually going to compensate for the other cuts, so it is actually a 14-percent across-the-board cut to the Department of Defense. That is the amendment we are going to vote on.

To paraphrase one of our great Presidents, Ronald Reagan: There they go again. There they go again.

I chair the Subcommittee on Readiness of the Armed Services Committee. One of the reasons I ran for the Senate in 2014 was exactly this issue of military readiness. As a colonel in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, I had a little bit of an up close and personal view on it.

The readiness of our Armed Forces in the second term of the Obama administration was plummeting. In the second term of the Obama administration, defense spending was cut by 25 percent, and, with that, the readiness of the men and women in the military plummeted. By the way, at the same time defense spending was cut by 25 percent, Russia was increasing defense spending by 34 percent, and China was increasing by 83 percent.

So let me just give an example. These numbers actually were classified, and they have been declassified. In 2015, when I arrived in the Senate, these were some of the numbers relating to readiness. Remember, we are supposed to be in charge of readiness here. Three of the 58 brigade combat teams in the U.S. Army—the brigade combat team is the 5,000 men and women deployed block in our military, and 3 of the 58 were at the tier 1 level of readiness that you want for a deployed unit. You can understand why that was classified in 2015 because we certainly didn't want our adversaries to know that. So 5 percent of the U.S. Army was fully ready to fight. Less than half of Marine Corps Navy aviation could fly—another classified number, now unclassified. Training and flight time for all military pilots plummeted.

When I arrived in 2015, the Obama administration proposed a cut of another 40,000 Active-Duty troops for the U.S. Army. One of the units they were looking to cut was the 4th Brigade of the 25th Infantry Division—the 4–25 at JBER in Alaska, the only airborne combat team in the Asia Pacific. I put every ounce of my energy into fighting that misguided decision. The 4–25 was not cut, thankfully. All the rest of the 40,000 were cut. We are still digging out of that hole.

So I want to throw something out there because people don't think about it. Imagine if there had been a major contingency or, yes, a war in 2015 with these readiness numbers. Sometimes wars hit us when we are least expecting them. I am going to talk about that.

I will tell you this: It would have been very ugly—not only for our national security but more importantly for our troops—for the men and women we are supposed to make sure are trained so that they never have to go into a fair fight, so we know they are always going to win.

We just celebrated the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Korean war on June 25, 1950. I am a bit of a Korean war history buff. I will tell you this: What we didn't celebrate was actually what happened in the summer of 1950 at the outbreak of the Korean war.

Here is what happened. The greatest military power in the world in 1945 was the U.S. military. We had just won World War II. By 1950, due to dramatic defense cuts, lack of training, lack of readiness, our military had a very difficult time halting the invasion of a third-world army, the North Korean army.

For the history buffs who understand Korean war history—the military certainly does—they know what Task Force Smith was. It was the first American unit that went in to stop the North Korean army. Task Force Smith was obliterated. Hundreds were killed in the summer of 1950. As a matter of fact, thousands of young Americans died horrible deaths during the summer of 1950 because the leadership in Congress, the leadership in the executive branch, and the leadership in the Pentagon let the readiness of our Armed Forces plummet. Let me repeat that: 70 years ago right now—if you look back 70 years ago in the summer of 1950 on the Korean Peninsula—thousands of young Americans were being killed because they weren't trained and they weren't ready.

This was probably one of the biggest derelictions of duty in U.S. history. Because it is a forgotten war, not many people know about it. But it was a dramatic failure of leadership in the Congress, the executive branch, and the military. The military even has a saying for this: ''No more Task Force Smith.'' We will never ever—ever—let our young men and women go fight a war where they are unprepared, and because of that, they die.

I agree we need to do all we can to address many of the social issues that my colleague from Vermont highlights, particularly during this pandemic. But we must never, as a Congress, gut our military readiness to such a degree that our young men and women come home in body bags as opposed to victors. That is what happened in the summer of 1950.

We were on a path toward this dangerous lack of readiness during the second term of the Obama administration. I cited the numbers. I chair the Subcommittee on Readiness. I have been all focused on this issue of rebuilding our readiness.

Here is the good news. With the Republicans in control in the Senate and the White House, we have begun to dramatically rebuild our military and our readiness. This has been a priority of ours. This has certainly been a priority of mine. Many of my colleagues, Democrats and Republicans, particularly on the Armed Services Committee, have been working on rebuilding our military. When we were looking at these numbers, so many people on the Armed Services Committee, including JACK REED, who just gave a very eloquent speech, recognized, whoa—dangerous world, dangerous neighborhood, and a military that is not ready. So we got to work.

I enjoy my bipartisan work here in the Senate. Some of my best friends are from the other side of the aisle, but there are principle disagreements on key issues between some on this side of the aisle and the other side. One of them is about the degree to which we support our military and national defense.

I know all of my colleagues are patriotic. I don't like doing the patriotism argument. Every Member of this body, all 100—we love our country. But there are some impressions when you look at what goes on here, when you look at the sweep of history with regard to readiness and funding our military.

Again, to my Democratic colleagues on the Armed Services Committee, Defense Appropriations, who, like me, attend the hearings regularly, dig into the issues, know the threats our country faces, I think we work together to rebuild readiness. But at the national level, here are the facts. Think about it. Carter, Clinton, Obama, Biden—what do those administrations all have in common? They get into power, and they cut our military, and morale plummets, and readiness plummets.

Let me go a little bit closer to home. Since I have been elected, the No. 1 bill my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have filibustered—the No. 1 bill when they want to take something hostage—is the Defense appropriations bill. Ten times, since I have been in this body, the funding for our men and women has been pulled in as a hostage—ten times. No other bill in the last 5½ years, since I have been here, has been filibustered more than the Defense appropriations bill.

Our friends in the media never report on this, but that is one of the issues that really burns me up here because it happens all the time. Trust me, our troops know it. They watch it, and they know it.

Now we have a Sanders amendment for across-the-board DOD cuts of 14 percent just as we are digging out of the readiness hole that we all know that we are in. If you don't acknowledge it, you are not paying attention.

The Senate minority leader has recently come out in favor of the Sanders amendment. I wonder where Joe Biden is on the Sanders amendment.

Of course, as my colleague from Illinois just mentioned, the Pentagon must do a better job of managing waste and cost overruns. I fully agree with that. In fact, the Trump administration was the first administration to finally undertake an audit of the Pentagon. Again, Democrats and Republicans on the Armed Services Committee pressed for it, and we finally got it. It took decades, but an audit of the Pentagon has finally happened.

Make no mistake, the Sanders amendment is the first salvo in the national Democratic leadership's goal of defunding the military across the board. If you don't want to take my word for it, here is the POLITICO op-ed from Senator SANDERS about his amendment titled: ''Defund the Pentagon: The Liberal Case.''

''Defund the Pentagon''—there they go again. This is a really important issue. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle defeat this amendment overwhelmingly—overwhelmingly. The men and women of the military are watching this amendment. The men and women of the military know that their readiness 5 years ago was in a really bad state.

The vote today and what is going to happen later—literally, if you look at history, we never know when the next conflict is coming. We didn't know that in the summer of 1950, the military was going to be rushed to the Korean Peninsula and would barely be able to hold its own. Thousands died because they weren't ready because of defense cuts by the Congress and the executive branch and the Pentagon.

So this is an important vote. The lives of the men and women in our military and their readiness could well depend on this vote, and I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to strongly reject it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

REMEMBERING JIM POSEWITZ

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, before I call up my amendment and get to the issue of our veterans in this country, I want to say a few words about a good friend and a legendary Montana conservationist named Jim Posewitz, who passed away a few weeks ago.

He was a towering figure in Montana and in the history of conservation in our great State. He was a man who knew right from wrong, and Montanans know that he was almost always right and seldom wrong.

Poz's accomplishments are too long to list, but any Montanan who fished in the Missouri River, learning the ethics of hunting or hiking in Montana's Rocky Mountain Front, owes a deep debt of gratitude to Poz's more than 30 years of work for the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and to his post-retirement work as a conservation advocate, ethicist, and leader.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 says that America's wildest places are those where man himself is a visitor. Poz understood that power, that magic, and the importance of these places. He was relentless in his fight to protect them, and he was uncompromising in his faith that they bring us closer to nature, to each other, and to ourselves. He never stopped fighting for Montana and for the wild places in Montana.

My heart goes out to Poz's family, including his life partner Gayle; his sons, Brian, Allen, Carl; Matthew and Matthew's wife Heather and their daughters, Sarah and Lindsay; his son Andrew and Andrew's wife Kelly and their daughters Madison and Charlotte; his stepdaughter Ann and Ann's husband Nate and their children, Joslin and Lyzander; his stepson Clayton and Clayton's wife Michelle and daughter Ayla. Poz is also survived by his brother John and John's wife Mary and their four children.

He will be greatly missed. He is somebody they only make one of, an incredible human being.

AMENDMENT NO. 1972, AS MODIFIED

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 1972, as modified, and ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Montana [Mr. TESTER] proposes an amendment numbered 1972, as modified, to amendment No. 2301.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: 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)

At the end of subtitle G of title X, add the following:

SEC. ___. ADDITIONAL 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.

Section 1116(a)(2) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subparagraphs:

''(I) Parkinsonism.

''(J) Bladder cancer.

''(K) Hypothyroidism.''.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I want to turn to the issue of the day, and that is this amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act.

Senator REED talked about it a few minutes ago because, quite frankly, justice is long overdue for thousands of veterans who are currently suffering and dying from illnesses related to exposure to Agent Orange in Vietnam.

You know, one of our most sacred duties is to take care of those who are wounded in service to this country, and the fact is, this administration, the Trump administration, has refused to expand the list of presumptive health conditions associated with Agent Orange to cover illnesses such as bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism. They don't seem to think that exposure to these toxic chemicals in Vietnam is a cost of war. Well, let me tell you, they are wrong. It is a cost of war. The fact is, this administration wants to outlive the Vietnam veterans, and they don't want to pay for it.

Every time we get in a situation—and I should say the last time we got in a situation, for sure—we sent off our young men and women in the military, and we put the cost on the credit card for our kids to pay and don't think a thing about it, but when they come back and they are changed, all of a sudden, we don't want to pay for it, especially when these conditions, in particular, already meet the historical standard to be added to the Department of Veterans Affairs' presumptive list for service connection.

Now, this is not just me talking. This is the National Academies of Medicine weighing in with their reviews of scientific evidence—scientific evidence. Each day this administration stonewalls benefits, more and more veterans are forced to live with the detrimental effects of their exposure without the assistance that not only they have earned but that we owe them—veterans like Bill Garber from Great Falls, MT.

In 1967, Bill enlisted in the U.S. Army, and within 6 months he was sent to fight in Vietnam, where he served as a combat engineer and demolitions expert with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division. During his yearlong tour in Vietnam, Bill saw heavy combat, and like most military folks who were in Vietnam, was exposed to Agent Orange.

Now, more than 50 years later, after his service and his sacrifice, Bill suffers from tremors diagnosed as Parkinsonism, one of the three conditions that would be covered by the Department of Veterans Affairs if this amendment passes. Bill's story is heroic, but the truth is, he is one of tens of thousands of Vietnam veterans in this country who are still waiting for this White House to grant them the benefits they have earned.

No more waiting. No more trying to outlive the Vietnam veteran. My amendment directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to acknowledge the overwhelming scientific evidence already put forward by veterans, scientists, and medical experts, and provide Vietnam veterans with the benefits they have earned in service to our country.

Today, we have an opportunity to end the needless suffering and disappointment for an entire generation of veterans who are counting on Congress to simply do the right thing. The reality is that taking care of our veterans is a cost of war and is a cost that must be paid. We must hold this administration accountable on behalf of thousands of veterans like Bill who gave so much for this country, and I urge my colleagues to get this done with a ''yes'' vote on this amendment so we can end the wait for veterans who have already sacrificed greatly and who shouldn't be forced to wait 1 minute longer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, in a few minutes we will vote on the Sanders amendment, which I support. As vice chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have worked with the Republican leadership and with Chairman SHELBY in recent years to strike budget agreements that resulted in parity between defense and nondefense spending. At the same time, amid a national and international public health crisis, the need to infuse more resources into public health, education, and business development programs has never been greater.

I have heard from my Republican colleagues on the floor objecting to the Sanders amendment. I would say to them that if they feel that strongly—

this is not authorized—but if they feel that strongly, they should tell their Republican leadership to allow the appropriations bill to come up so they can actually vote on the Defense bill. Right now, this is just idle chatter when they object to Senator SANDERS' amendment, and yet they are unwilling themselves to actually vote up or down on the appropriations bill for not only the Department of Defense bill but the other Departments. The Sanders amendment, after all, maintains full support for the personnel needs of the Department of Defense, as well as the critical medical research supported throughout the Department. It would also take some of the Department's sweeping budget and reserve it for underfunded domestic needs. This is long overdue.

I again call on my Republican colleagues to stop talking about the money you want or don't want to spend. Tell the Republican leader to allow the appropriations bills to come to the floor and vote up or down.

REMEMBERING JOHN LEWIS

Mr. President, on another issue, I have had such an incredibly heavy heart since I heard Friday night my dear friend and hero, John Lewis passed away. I stand here on the Senate floor today to talk about him.

When I got a call at our home in Vermont late that night, my wife, my son, and I just sat there and talked about John for hours and cried. We knew America lost a genuine hero—an unwavering lodestar who, over decades of selfless activism and public service, drew us closer to our ideals.

I remember when he invited me in to watch actually a sit-in by Democratic Members in the House of Representatives when the Republican Speaker had closed down the House for them to have votes. He saw me outside, and I asked him what is going on, and he said: You are my brother.

He took me by the arm, brought me in, and sat me down in the well of the House to watch what was going on. I was always humbled and honored to be called his brother, as he often did when we were together, including an unforgettable visit he had with us in Vermont just last year.

I have been thinking so much of what we can say, and there aren't enough words—there certainly aren't—in paying tribute to a man whose life was defined by the relentless and fearless pursuit of equality. John bled, literally, and his bones were broken, literally, for the causes of civil rights. He came to Congress bearing those scars—a living, breathing reminder that our society's progress on racial equality came through the sacrifices of heroes like him.

In Congress, John Lewis stood with equal moral clarity, serving as its conscience and reminding us that our work to build a genuinely equal and just society remains unfinished. His thundering words just months ago echo even more loudly today. He said:

When you see something that is not right . . . you have a moral obligation to say something. To do something. Our children and their children will ask us, ''What did you do?''

That is a question all of us must ask ourselves.

VOTING RIGHTS ADVANCEMENT ACT

Mr. President, there is one thing I am doing today that I want to share with my fellow Senators and Americans. Today, I am reintroducing the Voting Rights Advancement Act, and we are renaming it the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

This is bipartisan legislation. It has 47 Senate cosponsors. It would safeguard what John fought over a lifetime to achieve: equality at the voting booth. The bill would restore the Voting Rights Act to end the scourge of minority voter suppression.

Now, the House already passed a companion to the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act in December. Now let's do our part. We can't claim to honor the life of John Lewis if we refuse to carry out his life's work. Of course, if we stand in the way of that work, that would be the wrong thing to do.

So I would urge my fellow Senators, join me in calling on Senator MCCONNELL to allow a vote up or down on the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

Let's do that for John, but let's not do it simply because it is named after him but because it is precisely what John would do. And if we have a moral compass, we should do it and take action to forge a more perfect Union, protect our democracy, and above all, do what is right.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

AMENDMENT NO. 1788

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I call up amendment No. 1788, and I ask that it be reported by number.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the amendment by number.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Vermont [Mr. SANDERS] for himself and Mr. MARKEY, proposes an amendment numbered 1788 to amendment No. 2301.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To reduce the bloated Pentagon budget by 10 percent and invest that money in jobs, education, health care, and housing in communities in the United States in which the poverty rate is not less than 25 percent)

At the end of subtitle A of title X, add the following:

SEC. _____. REDUCTION IN AMOUNT AUTHORIZED TO BE APPROPRIATED FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021 BY THIS ACT; ESTABLISHMENT OF GRANT PROGRAM TO REDUCE POVERTY AND INVEST IN DISTRESSED COMMUNITIES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The amount authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2021 by this Act is—

(1) the aggregate amount authorized to be appropriated for fiscal year 2021 by this Act (other than for military personnel and the Defense Health Program); minus

(2) the amount equal to 14 percent of the aggregate amount described in paragraph (1).

(b) ALLOCATION.—The reduction made by subsection (a) shall—

(1) apply on a pro rata basis among the accounts and funds for which amounts are authorized to be appropriated by this Act (other than military personnel and the Defense Health Program);

(2) be applied on a pro rata basis across each program, project, and activity funded by the account or fund concerned; and

(3) be used by the Secretary of the Treasury to carry out the grant program described in subsection (c).

(c) GRANT PROGRAM.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the Department of the Treasury a grant program through which the Secretary of the Treasury shall, in coordination with the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Secretary of the Interior, and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, provide grants to eligible entities in accordance with the requirements of this subsection.

(2) APPLICATION.—An eligible entity that desires a grant under this subsection shall submit to the Secretary of the Treasury an application in such form and containing such information as the Secretary may require.

(3) PURPOSES.—

(A) PERMISSIBLE PURPOSES.—An eligible entity that receives a grant under this subsection may use the grant funds for any of the following:

(i) To construct, renovate, retrofit, or perform maintenance with respect to an affordable housing unit, a public school, a childcare facility, a community health center, a public hospital, a library, or a clean drinking water facility if any such building or facility is located within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(ii) To remove contaminants, including lead, from infrastructure with respect to the provision of drinking water if that infrastructure is located within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(iii) To replace, remove, or renovate a vacant or blighted property that is located within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(iv) To hire public school teachers to reduce class size at public schools within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(v) To increase the pay of teachers at public schools within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(vi) To provide nutritious meals to children and parents who live within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(vii) To provide free tuition to residents within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity to attend public institutions of higher education, including vocational and trade schools.

(viii) To provide rental assistance to residents within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(ix) To reduce or eliminate homelessness within the jurisdiction of the eligible entity.

(B) IMPERMISSIBLE PURPOSES.—An eligible entity that receives a grant under this subsection may not use the grant funds—

(i) to construct a law enforcement facility, including a prison or a jail; or

(ii) to purchase a vehicle for a law enforcement agency.

(4) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection—

(A) the term ''eligible entity'' means—

(i) a county government with respect to a high-poverty county;

(ii) a local or municipal government within the jurisdiction of which there are not fewer than 5 high-poverty neighborhoods; and

(iii) a federally recognized Indian Tribe that exercises jurisdiction over Indian lands (as defined in section 824(b) of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (25 U.S.C. 1680n(b))) that contain high-poverty neighborhoods;

(B) the term ''high-poverty county'' means a county with a poverty rate of not less than 25 percent, according to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates of the Bureau of the Census for 2018;

(C) the term ''high-poverty neighborhood'' means a census tract with a poverty rate of not less than 25 percent, according to the 5-year estimate of the American Community Survey of the Bureau of the Census for years 2014 through 2018; and

(D) the term ''public school'' means a public elementary school or secondary school, as those terms are defined in section 8101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I thank Senator LEAHY for his support of our amendment, for his beautiful words on John Lewis, and for his insistence that this Senate makes sure that every American has the right to vote. That is not asking too much, and that is a bill we should deal with.

Mr. President, I rise to speak in support of the amendment I have filed for the National Defense Authorization Act to cut the bloated $740 billion Pentagon budget by 10 percent and use that $74 billion in savings to invest in human needs here at home.

This amendment is being cosponsored by Senators MARKEY, WARREN, MERKLEY, WYDEN, and Senator LEAHY and will receive a rollcall at 12:10 p.m.

This amendment has been endorsed by more than 60 organizations representing millions of working people, environmentalists, and religious leaders, including Public Citizen, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

In America today, we are experiencing an extraordinary set of crises unprecedented in the history of the United States of America. We are in the midst of a public health crisis that is worse than at any time since the Spanish flu of 1918. Over the past 4 months, the coronavirus has infected more than 3.7 million Americans and caused nearly 140,000 deaths.

We are in the midst of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. During the COVID–19 pandemic, 119 million Americans have seen a decline in their income—unbelievable. One hundred and nineteen million Americans have seen a decline in their income, 50 million have filed for unemployment, and American households have lost over $6 trillion in wealth.

All over this country—in the State of Vermont and in every other State in America—people are going hungry in America. People are going hungry. And many, many people are frightened to death that they will soon be evicted from their apartments or will lose their homes to foreclosure.

That is where the American people are today: loss of jobs, loss of income, hunger, eviction.

On the other hand, there is another reality going on in America today. We don't talk about it much, but we should, and that is that 600 billionaires in our country have seen their wealth go up by $700 billion during the pandemic. So we entered this pandemic with massive income and wealth inequality since the pandemic, and the very rich have become even richer, while working people have seen a significant decline in their income and wealth.

The current crisis, or series of crises, have revealed the extraordinary inequities in our economy. If people didn't know it before, they surely know it now.

In the United States today, over half of our workers live paycheck to paycheck. Not surprisingly, when you live paycheck to paycheck, and the paycheck stops coming in, you are in financial distress. That means that your economic situation goes from poverty, which is low wages, to desperation, which is no income coming in at all. That means that you go hungry. It means that you may become homeless. It means that when you get sick, you no longer have health insurance or the income to see a doctor.

What the pandemic has taught us is that a relatively low unemployment rate, which is what we had before the pandemic, does not adequately guarantee for the security and well-being of working families.

When tens of millions of our people earn starvation wages, that is not a good economy. When 40 percent of our people do not have the savings to pay for a $400 emergency, that is not what I would call a good economy. When over half a million Americans are homeless and 18 million families spend at least half of their incomes on housing, that is not a good economy. When 87 million people are uninsured or underinsured, that is not a good economy. In other words, to create a good economy, we are going to have to do a whole lot better than that.

Further, over the last few months, hundreds of thousands of Americans have taken to the streets to demand justice for the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, and Ahmaud Arbery, among many others, and to end the rampant police brutality that we see in America today. These tragic killings of unarmed African Americans have highlighted the urgent need to rethink the nature of policing and to fix a broken and racist criminal justice system.

On top of all of that—on top of a pandemic, on top of an economic collapse, on top of systemic racism—we have to address the existential threat facing this planet of climate change.

A few weeks ago, temperatures in Siberia—the coldest region on Earth—topped 100 degrees, shattering records. If we do not get our act together and transform our energy system away from fossil fuel and into renewable energy, we will be leaving this planet increasingly unhealthy and uninhabitable for our kids and future generations.

That is where we are today: hunger, homelessness, racism, a warming and dangerously warming climate. These are the issues that we have to focus on. Our attention must be on improving the lives of ordinary Americans—working people, lower income people—and doing what we can to work with countries around the world to help the billions of people living in economic distress.

With that, I rise today to make it abundantly clear that if we are going to address those issues, if we are going to protect the working families of this country who are now under so much stress, it is absolutely imperative that we change our national priorities.

The status quo and conventional wisdom that we see on TV every day and that we hear on the floor of the Senate is no longer good enough. History has overtaken us. Unprecedented crises have overtaken us. The status quo is not good enough. We must respond.

We must finally have the courage to stand up to powerful special interests and all of their campaign money and understand that we cannot allow these people to continue to have so much power over the economic and political life of this country; that we must start developing policies that work for working families, not just the rich, not just the powerful, and not just those who contribute to super PACs.

Fifty-three years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., challenged our country to fight against three major evils: ''The evil of racism, the evil of poverty, and the evil of war.'' That was what Dr. King said 53 years ago. And if there were ever a moment in American history when we need to respond to Dr. King's clarion call for justice and demand, as he stated, ''a radical revolution of values,'' now is that time. This is the moment for us to bring about what Dr. King called ''a radical revolution of values,'' whether it is fighting against systemic racism and police brutality, whether it is transforming our energy system away from fossil fuel, whether it is ending a cruel and dysfunctional healthcare system, or addressing the grotesque level of income and wealth inequality in our country, now is the time for change, real change.

In my view, given all of the unprecedented crises our country faces, now is not the time to increase the Pentagon's bloated $740 billion budget, which is 53 percent of all discretionary spending in America. Let me repeat that. The military budget alone is 53 percent of all discretionary spending in this country.

At a time when 28 million Americans are in danger of being evicted from their homes, now is not the time to be spending more on the military than the next 11 nations combined.

At a time when 30 million Americans have lost their jobs, now is not the time to be spending more on national defense than we did at the height—the height—of the Cold War or the wars in

Korea or Vietnam. Let me repeat: spending more in real, inflation-accounted-for dollars today on the military than we did during the Cold War or the wars in Korea or Vietnam.

At this unprecedented moment in our history, now is the time to provide jobs, education, healthcare, and housing in American communities that have been ravaged by the global pandemic, by extreme poverty, by deindustrialization, and mass incarceration.

If this horrific pandemic we are now experiencing has taught us anything, it is that national security means a lot more than building bombs, missiles, jet fighters, submarines, nuclear warheads, and other weapons of mass destruction. National security also means doing everything we can to improve the lives of our people, many of whom have been abandoned by our government decade after decade.

The amendment that I am offering today would cut the $740 billion budget—Pentagon budget—by 10 percent and use that $74 billion in savings to invest in distressed communities in every State in this country, communities that have been ravaged by poverty, mass incarceration, and other enormous problems.

Under this amendment, distressed cities and towns would be able to use this $74 billion to create jobs by building affordable housing, new schools, childcare facilities, community health centers, public hospitals, libraries, sustainable energy projects, and clean drinking water facilities. These communities would also receive Federal funding to hire more public school teachers, provide nutritious meals to children, and offer free tuition at public colleges, universities, and trade schools.

Over and over again, our Republican friends—my colleagues here—have told us we cannot possibly afford to address the enormous problems facing working families: We just can't afford it. We don't have the money to deal with homelessness and hunger and inadequate education.

That is what they say every day. We have been told that we cannot afford to make public colleges and universities tuition-free or to provide a decent income for every man, woman, and child. But when it comes to spending $740 billion on the military, well, suddenly, hey, money is no problem; we can spend as much as we want. Hey, let's listen to all of the lobbyists from the military-industrial complex who flood Capitol Hill and tell us all their needs. We have to listen to them, but we don't listen to the children in this country who may not have enough food to eat or the workers in this country who are sleeping out in their cars. We don't listen to them, but when it comes to the military, hey, no end to the money that we can provide.

To my mind, that is unacceptable. We don't need more nuclear weapons. We don't need more cruise missiles. We don't need more fighter jets. What we do need in this country, desperately, is more healthcare, more housing, more childcare, and better schools.

Now is the time to fundamentally change our national priorities, and that is what this amendment is all about. This amendment in itself is not going to do anywhere near what we need to do as a country, but it is an important step forward in changing the way we think about our needs.

Let me be clear. If we were to institute a 10-percent cut in military spending, that $74 billion could provide high-quality childcare to every family in America. Imagine that. We could solve the childcare crisis in America just by cutting the military budget by 10 percent.

We could, by cutting the military budget by 10 percent, provide section 8 housing vouchers to all of the 7.7 million families in America who are paying more than half of their limited incomes on rent.

A 10-percent cut to the Pentagon could provide a free college education for 2 million low-income students.

A 10-percent cut to the Pentagon is enough to hire 900,000 teachers in the poorest schools in America.

So I am a little bit tired about hearing that we don't have enough money for nuclear weapons, that we need more money for missiles and tanks and guns—that we need more for all of that, yet we are turning our backs on Americans who are hurting the most.

I believe this is a moment in history when it would be a very good idea for all of my colleagues, Democratic and Republican, to remember what former Republican—Republican—President Dwight D. Eisenhower said in 1953. I think we all recall that Eisenhower knew something about military budgets and the war because he was the four-star general who led the Allied forces to victory in Europe during World War II. He was not a passivist. He was not an anti-war activist. He was a four-star general.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said:

> Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children.

Right now, when the world is searching for treatment of the coronavirus, when we are searching desperately and spending billions looking for a vaccine, maybe it might be a good idea to be educating our young people to figure out how we deal with disease—with cancer and schizophrenia and Alzheimer's and diabetes—rather than putting more and more scientists into figuring out how we can blow the world up a dozen times over.

What Eisenhower said was true—profoundly true—67 years ago, and it is true today, maybe even truer today.

When we analyze the Defense Department budget, it is interesting to note that the Congress has appropriated so much money for the Defense Department that the Pentagon literally does not know what to do with it. Between 2013 and 2018, they actually returned more than $80 billion in funding back to the Treasury. They had more money than they could spend.

In my view, the time is long overdue for us to take a hard look not only at the size of the Pentagon budget but at the enormous amount of waste, cost overruns, fraud, and at the financial mismanagement that has plagued the Department of Defense for decades.

Let's be clear. We don't talk about it, but let's be clear. About half of the Pentagon's budget goes directly into the hands of private contractors, not our troops. Over the past two decades, virtually every major defense contractor in the United States has paid billions of dollars in fines and settlements for misconduct and fraud, all while making huge profits on those government contracts. Virtually every major defense contractor has been found guilty of misconduct or fraud.

Since 1995, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and United Technologies have paid over $3 billion in fines or related settlements for fraud or misconduct. Further, I find it interesting that the very same defense contractors that have been found guilty or reached settlements for fraud are also paying their CEOs excessive—excessive—compensation packages. Last year, the CEOs of Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman both made over $20 million in total compensation, while around 90 percent of these companies' revenue came from defense contracts. In other words, for all intents and purposes, these companies are basically government agencies. Ninety percent of the revenue coming in comes from the taxpayers of this country. Meanwhile, the CEOs of those companies make over 100 times more than the Secretary of Defense makes. It is not too surprising, therefore, that we have a revolving door where our military people end up on the boards of directors of these major defense companies.

Moreover, as the GAO has told us, there are massive cost overruns in the Defense Department's acquisition budget that we continue to ignore year after year. According to the GAO, the Pentagon's $1.8 trillion acquisition portfolio currently suffers from more than $628 billion in cost overruns, with much of the cost growth taking place after production.

A major reason why there is so much waste, fraud, and abuse at the Pentagon is the fact that the Defense Department remains the only Federal agency in America that has not been able to pass an independent audit. Many of us will recall what then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld—George W. Bush's Secretary of Defense—told the American people on the day before 9/11. It never got a lot of attention—the day before 9/11. Rumsfeld said:

Our financial systems are decades old. According to some estimates, we cannot track $2.3 trillion in transactions.

I don't know that the situation has changed very much since 2001 and Rumsfeld's remarks. Yet, nearly 20 years after Rumsfeld's statements, the Defense Department has still not passed a clean audit, despite the fact that the Pentagon controls assets in excess of $2.2 trillion or roughly 70 percent of what the entire Federal Government owns.

I believe in a strong military, but we cannot keep giving more money to the Pentagon than it needs when millions of children in this country face hunger every day and 140 million Americans cannot afford the basic necessities of life without going into debt.

In 1967 Dr. King warned us that ''a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.'' I believe the time is long overdue for us to listen to Dr. King.

At a time when, in the richest country in the history of the world, so many of our people are struggling, now is the time to change our priorities because, as Dr. King stated, we are approaching spiritual death.

At a time when we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of almost any major country on Earth, at a time when 60,000 Americans die each year because they can't get to a doctor on time and 1 out of 5 Americans cannot afford the prescription drugs their doctors prescribe, we need to start focusing on those people, not on the military-industrial complex.

At this moment of unprecedented national crisis—a pandemic, an economic meltdown, the demand to end systemic racism, and an unstable President—it is time for us to truly focus on what we value as a society and to fundamentally transform our national priorities. Cutting the military budget by 10 percent and investing that money in human needs is a modest way to begin that process.

Let me conclude by once again quoting Dwight D. Eisenhower. I don't know that I have ever quoted a Republican quite as much as I have during these remarks, but he is somebody whom I respected very much.

This is what Eisenhower said when he left office. This was back in 1961. He was out, and John F. Kennedy was coming in. This is what he said. I hope we can all remember this. He said:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

Eisenhower was right then, and, if anything, the situation is worse today. Now is the time for us to stand up to the greed and irresponsibility of the military industrial complex. Now is the time to address the needs of working families, the elderly, the children, the sick, and the poor.

Let us vote for the Sanders-Markey-Warren-Merkley-Wyden-Leahy amendment to cut the Pentagon budget by 10 percent and invest in human needs here at home.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LANKFORD). The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I am proud to speak in support of my amendment with Senator SANDERS to prioritize investments in our communities over a bloated Pentagon budget. I thank Senator SANDERS for his leadership on this issue, bringing forth this fundamental tension that exists within our society.

The men and women of the Armed Forces deserve our admiration, our respect, and our support. Day in and day out, they defend our country's interests in all corners of the world, and their families sacrifice alongside them. But what makes America the envy of the world is not simply the strength of our military but the strength of our people.

And 2020 has brought historic challenges: a global pandemic, a growing recession, a reckoning on the systemic racism that pervades our country. We have also seen an estimated 5.4 million American workers lose their health insurance between February and May, leaving them even more vulnerable to a virus surging in every corner of this country.

The Sanders-Markey amendment states that we cannot afford, in this, our moment of national crisis, to spend three-quarters of a trillion dollars on bloated defense spending—spending that is supposed to protect or country yet did nothing to inoculate against the most profound public health emergency in a century.

This amendment is also in keeping with President Eisenhower's warning, as Senator SANDERS said, that ''we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist.''

Persist it has. This $740 billion fiscal year 2021 budget before us is the fulfillment of Ike's worst fears. In his address to the American people, President Eisenhower also predicted that a permanent arms industry would come to call the shots. After Japan surrendered aboard the USS *Missouri* in 1945, ending the Second World War, that permanent arms industry made its fixture.

After we emerged victorious in a historic and ideological struggle against the Soviet Union that brought us to the brink of nuclear holocaust, Eisenhower's feared permanent arms industry stuck around and retooled to advocate for new weapons to fight the endless war to come.

The catastrophic attacks of September 11 led to more than a doubling of the Pentagon's budget. Multiple Presidents have stretched a limited authorization of military force to go after those responsible for the 9/11 attacks—to fight new enemies in new geographies, outside of Afghanistan.

All told, so far, we have spent $6.4 trillion in the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and other places since 2001. Even as those wars wind down, the defense industry is pushing for costly new acquisition programs to maintain superiority over China and Russia.

The forecasted ''permanent arms industry'' begins to explain why the Pentagon accounts for half of the entire fiscal year 2021 U.S. discretionary budget. Our military budget is larger than the next 10 countries combined. Our battle fleet is larger than the next 13 navies combined, with 11 of those 13 navies represented by our allies or our partners.

However, every dollar spent on the Pentagon is one fewer available to fight the scourge of poverty in this country, to strengthen the social safety net and protect American families. Our communities have suffered while we spend ourselves into extreme U.S. military dominance.

I fear that the Pentagon budget we debate today shows to a child that we don't prioritize giving him or her a quality education; shows mothers and fathers that, in the wealthiest country in the world, they will forever remain one illness away from financial ruin; shows a family that the dream of homeownership, much less affordable rental housing, will remain out of their grasp; shows frontline heroes working in hospitals and nursing homes in Chelsea, MA, and across the country that they have no choice but to go work sick because their employer does not offer paid leave.

I reject the false choice between a strong U.S. military and strong American communities. Trillions of dollars in defense spending did nothing to protect us from the coronavirus pandemic. The defense spending can't protect us from the destruction of the environment and the worsening climate crisis. Yet we are due to spend nearly 70 times more on defense than we will to protect against the next pandemic and other global health challenges.

We must no longer equate national security with our inventory of planes, missiles, and nuclear weapons system, and if coronavirus is truly a war, as President Trump says it is, he is duty-bound to embrace the fact that national security also means health, housing, and financial security, and national security means doing everything we can to save and improve lives in American communities, particularly communities of color, that have been neglected for too long and that have born the worst of the coronavirus impacts.

Our amendment begins that important work by making smart cuts of 10 percent to the budget of the Pentagon for this fiscal year and redirecting those funds to the Department of the Treasury to administer a grant program to strengthen vulnerable, low-income communities.

For example, in Massachusetts, we would be eligible to receive up to $1 billion in Federal funding to create jobs by building affordable housing, schools, childcare facilities, community health centers, public hospitals, libraries, and clean drinking water facilities, removing lead pipes and replacing vacant or blighted properties; to improve education by hiring more public school teachers to reduce class sizes, increasing teacher pay, providing universal nutritious meals, and providing free tuition to attend public colleges, universities, or trade schools; and to make housing more affordable by providing rental assistance and eliminating homelessness.

We should prioritize eradicating poverty, not war. We should prioritize battling global killer diseases, not developing a new weapon designed to eradicate the human race. It is time we funded education, not annihilation—Medicaid, not missiles.

Where do we start to make Defense Department cuts? First, we must end the war in Afghanistan, which would save tens of billions of dollars. The time is long overdue to bring our men and women home. And it is time to double down on other tools of U.S. statecraft—diplomacy and development—to shape a better future for Afghanistan, particularly Afghan women.

As we work to put a stop to endless war and repeal the 2001 AUMF, the Pentagon must realign its budget to reflect the cold, hard wisdom of Ronald Reagan that ''a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.''

Between the Departments of Defense and Energy, we are due to spend nearly $50 billion on nuclear weapons in fiscal year 2021. Over the next three decades, we are on course to spend $1.7 trillion on nuclear weapons overkill. We can field a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent—one that assures our allies and partners—all without breaking the bank.

Our people, not our military parades, are the source of American greatness. Over the past few months, this country has experienced a reckoning, as Americans from all walks of life have had enough. They have had enough of being lied to by the President about the true threat of a deadly disease. They have had enough of people of color being murdered in cold blood by the very police forces meant to serve and protect them. And they have had enough of being told there just isn't enough money to support the well-being of their communities, while they can see billions in taxpayers' dollars going to unnecessary wars and nuclear weapons programs and to benefit the President's friends and family.

The choice today is very clear. We are ready to take the smallest step, a 10-percent cut, to begin to address the gap in resources in this country. This is the time for us to stand up. We are about to have a debate on how much money we have to help families in this country through this pandemic. We are being told that money is not there for unemployment insurance; for cities and towns not to have to lay off teachers; for cities and towns to have the testing, the contact tracing, and the personal protective equipment to protect families in our country; to make sure we can provide sick care leave; and to make sure we can provide childcare for families in this country. We are told there is not enough money. Yes, there is, and that money is in the defense budget of the United States of America, so that we can protect those families.

Too many people right now are nostalgic for a time that never was, instead of having the idealism which we need to battle the issues of today. But for the poor, the sick, the elderly, the disabled, the Black and Brown and immigrant families in this country, the past is just a memory and the future is their hard reality.

This is the time for the U.S. Senate to stand up and to begin the funding of the programs which every family needs to protect themselves. I urge an ''aye'' vote on this amendment, and, again, I thank Senator SANDERS for his incredible progressive leadership on this issue and for so many others.

I yield back.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1788

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question occurs on agreeing to the Sanders amendment No. 1788.

The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. 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 senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 23, nays 77, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 135 Leg.]

YEAS—23

Baldwin	Hirono	Schatz
Blumenthal	Klobuchar	Schumer
Booker	Leahy	Smith
Cantwell	Markey	Udall
Cardin	Merkley	Van Hollen
Casey	Murphy	Warren
Durbin	Murray	Wyden
Gillibrand	Sanders	

NAYS—77

Alexander	Duckworth	Lee
Barrasso	Enzi	Loeffler
Bennet	Ernst	Manchin
Blackburn	Feinstein	McConnell
Blunt	Fischer	McSally
Boozman	Gardner	Menendez
Braun	Graham	Moran
Brown	Grassley	Murkowski
Burr	Harris	Paul
Capito	Hassan	Perdue
Carper	Hawley	Peters
Cassidy	Heinrich	Portman
Collins	Hoeven	Reed
Coons	Hyde-Smith	Risch
Cornyn	Inhofe	Roberts
Cortez Masto	Johnson	Romney
Cotton	Jones	Rosen
Cramer	Kaine	Rounds
Crapo	Kennedy	Rubio
Cruz	King	Sasse
Daines	Lankford	Scott (FL)
Scott (SC)	Sullivan	Warner
Shaheen	Tester	Whitehouse
Shelby	Thune	Wicker
Sinema	Tillis	Young
Stabenow	Toomey	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 23, the nays are 77.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is not agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1788) was rejected.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 1972, AS MODIFIED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is on agreeing to the Tester amendment, No. 1972, as modified.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, 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.

The result was announced—yeas 94, nays 6, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 136 Leg.]

YEAS—94

Alexander	Gillibrand	Reed
Baldwin	Graham	Risch
Barrasso	Grassley	Roberts
Bennet	Harris	Romney
Blackburn	Hassan	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hawley	Rounds
Blunt	Heinrich	Rubio
Booker	Hirono	Sanders
Boozman	Hoeven	Sasse
Brown	Hyde-Smith	Schatz
Burr	Inhofe	Schumer
Cantwell	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Capito	Jones	Shaheen
Cardin	Kaine	Shelby
Carper	King	Sinema
Casey	Klobuchar	Smith
Cassidy	Lankford	Stabenow
Collins	Leahy	Sullivan
Coons	Loeffler	Tester
Cornyn	Manchin	Thune
Cortez Masto	Markey	Tillis
Cotton	McConnell	Toomey
Cramer	McSally	Udall
Crapo	Menendez	Van Hollen
Daines	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Moran	Warren
Durbin	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Enzi	Murphy	Wicker
Ernst	Murray	Wyden
Feinstein	Perdue	Young
Fischer	Peters	
Gardner	Portman	

NAYS—6

Braun	Kennedy	Paul
Cruz	Lee	Scott (FL)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ROMNEY). On this vote the yeas are 94, the nays are 6.

Under the previous order requiring 60 votes for the adoption of this amendment, the amendment is agreed to.

The amendment (No. 1972) was agreed to.

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 amendment No. 2301 to Calendar No. 483, S. 4049, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal

year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Mike Crapo, Pat Roberts, John Cornyn, John Barrasso, Cory Gardner, Roy Blunt, Thom Tillis, Marsha Blackburn, Mike Rounds, Shelley Moore Capito, Kevin Cramer, John Thune, James M. Inhofe, Jerry Moran, Joni Ernst, John Boozman.

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 amendment No. 2301 offered by the Senator from Oklahoma to S. 4049, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 87, nays 13, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 137 Leg.]

YEAS—87

Alexander	Ernst	Perdue
Baldwin	Feinstein	Peters
Barrasso	Fischer	Portman
Bennet	Gardner	Reed
Blackburn	Graham	Risch
Blumenthal	Grassley	Roberts
Blunt	Hassan	Rosen
Boozman	Hawley	Rounds
Braun	Heinrich	Rubio
Brown	Hirono	Sasse
Burr	Hoeven	Schatz
Cantwell	Hyde-Smith	Schumer
Capito	Inhofe	Scott (FL)
Cardin	Johnson	Scott (SC)
Carper	Jones	Shaheen
Casey	Kaine	Shelby
Cassidy	King	Sinema
Collins	Klobuchar	Smith
Coons	Lankford	Stabenow
Cornyn	Leahy	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Loeffler	Tester
Cotton	Manchin	Thune
Cramer	McConnell	Tillis
Crapo	McSally	Toomey
Cruz	Menendez	Udall
Daines	Moran	Warner
Duckworth	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murphy	Wicker
Enzi	Murray	Young

NAYS—13

Booker	Markey	Van Hollen
Gillibrand	Merkley	Warren
Harris	Paul	Wyden
Kennedy	Romney	
Lee	Sanders	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). On this vote, the yeas are 87, the nays are 13.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion was agreed to.

The Senator from Iowa.

CHINA

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, the coronavirus doesn't come with a label saying ''Made in China,'' but perhaps it should. This pandemic, which began in Wuhan, China, has flooded the world just like so many products from China that we all now rely upon to protect ourselves against the spread of the contagion. The situation underscores the conundrum our Nation faces balancing the need to work with the Chinese Government and the challenges of holding the Communist Party accountable for its devious deeds.

Plain and simple: The Chinese Communist Party attempted to cover up the outbreak of COVID–19 from the very beginning and continues to do so today. Rather than containing the spread of the virus, the regime has focused on containing knowledge of the outbreak, going so far as punishing Chinese scientists who dared to warn about the virus's imminent danger.

As a result, we now face a worldwide pandemic that has claimed countless victims and could impact every aspect of our lives for months, if not years, to come. China doesn't play by the rules. They constantly seek to undermine the law. And if you ask an Iowa farmer, they will tell you the same.

For years, China has stolen intellectual property and reneged on their trade agreements. While we have seen China still purchasing some of our corn and soybeans, they haven't completely held up their end of the deal when it comes to China phase one.

Folks, when China cheats on trade deals, the impact is real: American jobs are lost and wealth is transferred from the United States to the Communist Party of China. This is unacceptable, especially after the damage already caused to our economy by China's mishandling of the coronavirus outbreak.

For decades, our leaders in Washington played along, remaining quiet as China stole American intellectual property and scientific research, cheated on trade deals, and violated basic human rights. Those days are over.

President Trump is standing up to China by taking decisive actions against the Communist regime for its flagrant violation of trade deals and crackdown on the autonomy and rights of Hong Kong.

I have heard this from farmers in Iowa. They know that this President is standing up for them and pushing back on China. And here in the Senate, my colleagues and I are also holding China accountable.

Right now, I am laser-focused on decreasing our dependency on China for critical supplies. The COVID–19 pandemic has been what I call a great awakening when it comes to the vulnerabilities in our supply chain. The United States has become far too dependent on Communist China for items like personal protective equipment, prescription drugs, and other essential medical supplies. We need to fix that. And that is what I am fighting to do.

During my military service, including as a logistics battalion commander in the Iowa Army National Guard, I learned firsthand the importance of securing the defense supply chain. We cannot continue to rely on our adversaries, like China, for critically important national security materials.

That is why, in this year's annual Defense bill, I made it a priority to boost support for university research in places like Iowa to ensure we can make and manufacture metals and materials here at home. This will help make sure China doesn't corner the world market on key materials.

Retaking our supply chain from Red China also means removing unnecessary redtape imposed by Washington. I am working to waive the tax penalties for manufacturing and medical supply companies that choose to relocate to America.

I have also demanded the Treasury Department investigate how Chinese companies are avoiding taxes that U.S. businesses have to pay.

Iowans across the State have told me how much they appreciate this President standing up for them by pushing back on the years of bad actions by the Communist Party. They also want to end our dependence on that same Communist regime.

Yes, we can and we should continue trading important agricultural products. But at the same time, we should bring jobs back and make critical supplies ourselves so that when you look at a product's label, it proudly reads ''Made in the U.S.A.''

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator ERNST for putting this colloquy together. What she just said with regard to the importance of having reliable sources here in America is absolutely right.

The supply chain issue is one that I hope we will address in this COVID package—for starters, with regard to our personal protective gear, the PPE, because if we can't rely on having masks and gowns and other PPE made here in America, it is tough for us, particularly during an international pandemic like this, to build and rely on countries like China. Also, frankly, some of the product that comes from China has not been reliable itself.

I appreciate what you are doing there and also the work you are doing to encourage us to be more resourceful here at home, to be sure we are doing the things we have to do to protect ourselves from foreign influence, including China.

Part of our issue with China, I think, is that for the last several years, a lot of us point fingers at China and we are not pointing fingers, frankly, at our internal problems. We need to get our house in order here in America and protect ourselves better. We have legislation to do that, which we just reported out of the Governmental Affairs Committee today. It has to do with this issue of China coming to the United States and systemically targeting promising research and promising researchers, and saying: We would like to get that research.

The research is often supported by the U.S. taxpayer. It is sort of tough

here for us in America to lose our research and our innovation and our intellectual property to other countries. It is particularly tough when taxpayers pay for it, and $150 billion a year of taxpayer money goes to the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Department of Energy to do basic research.

That is good. We have helped to develop important therapies and cures for some kinds of cancer. We helped to develop the internet. It has been very helpful on manufacturing processes. A lot of great things have come out of that research.

But one thing that really troubles me is that for 20 years now, with China taking the lead and other countries, as well—Iran, North Korea, and others—they have again targeted these researchers and this research and said: We want to get that. And, frankly, they get it on the cheap because the research is being paid for by our tax dollars.

Let me give you an example of what I am talking about. Recently, in my home State of Ohio, there was a case along these lines. I applaud the FBI and the Department of Justice and our U.S. attorneys for finally getting on top of this issue. We spent a year studying this issue here in the Congress in what is called the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which I chair. We found out that this was a huge problem and wrote a report late last year.

In the report, we implored our Federal law enforcement agencies to get on this issue. In fact, we had a hearing where an FBI agent testified and said that it is true. We haven't been focused on this, and we have to make that up now.

They are making up for it. They are arresting a number of people. They are doing the things that should be done to try to stop some of this stealing, really, of our seed corn, our technology, our innovation, our intellectual property.

Here is the Ohio example. Recently, the FBI announced that it had arrested a researcher connected with the world-renowned Cleveland Clinic and Case Western Reserve University. This individual had received a huge grant from the National Institutes of Health, or NIH. That grant was for about $3.6 million. But then this same individual—of course, not telling NIH or telling Cleveland Clinic or Case Western or anybody else—had accepted money from China.

In the contracts that we were able to research during our investigation, these contracts with China say you are not allowed to reveal that you have this relationship with China, that you are getting the money from China. They not only gave this guy money—$3 million—but they gave him a deanship at Wuhan University. They gave him money to hire people in Wuhan. They gave him the ability to travel around America recruiting others. We think he recruited 30 or 40 people, according to the FBI.

Again, these are all allegations. His arrest has been made. He actually is alleged to have taken biological samples from Cleveland, OH, to China—this taxpayer-paid NIH research—literally, physically taking these to China. They also, by the way, provided lodging for him with a three-bedroom apartment in Wuhan. That is luxury.

This is about money. Unfortunately, this is about people who are not patriots but instead are willing to sell us out by selling their research, their expertise that our taxpayers have funded to China and other countries.

NIH, recently, by the way, fired or forced the resignation of 54 researchers—not 1 or 2 or 3, but 54 people. We have been pushing them hard to find out who these people are and what they are doing. They haven't been willing to reveal that yet because this is a matter under investigation. They have told us that of those who are under investigation at NIH, 90 percent have ties to China—90 percent.

Wake up, America. Here we are. We are in a situation where other countries, particularly China, have targeted American research, American researchers, and are now taking this back to China to benefit their military, to benefit their economy, and to benefit their healthcare system.

By the way, I do not believe this is for academic purposes. It is wrong what is happening, but it is even more wrong because this is not as if they are taking it back to do joint research on an academic basis.

Let me tell you what the State Department told us at our hearing on this topic at the end of last year. They said: ''The Chinese Communist Party has declared the Chinese university system to be on the front line of military-civilian fusion efforts for technology acquisition.''

This is our own State Department. That means there is a clear link between the research that is being taken in America and the latest advancement in China's military and its economy.

It has been happening for 20 years. It is time to put an end to it. The legislation that we were able to get through committee today takes a really important step in that direction. There are four or five elements of it.

One of the most important to me is giving the FBI and law enforcement the tools they need to go after these individuals by creating a new criminal law that says if you lie on these forms, if you are taking money from China, it is certainly a conflict of commitment and a conflict of interest. You can be taken to task for that and held accountable. Right now you can't.

They are arresting these people on things like mail fraud, tax evasion. It is a little like how they used to go after gangsters before there were laws directly related to racketeering and so on. This is something where we need to be sure that we are giving people the tools that they need.

We also help the State Department to keep these people out, and we help with regard to our universities to ensure that we are reporting and being transparent as to the money universities are receiving from China and other countries.

Again, I thank my colleague from Iowa for having this colloquy. I see we have two other colleagues here. I know they are really well-versed and involved in these issues, and I want to hear from them, as well.

I would just say that I hope, on a bipartisan basis—by the way, our legislation is bipartisan. Our investigation was bipartisan. I would say this is nonpartisan. This is an American issue. We should all be standing up to protect the American research enterprise and to be sure that our taxpayers, when they pay for this important research, have the benefit of it rather than its being taken, in particular, by China to benefit their military and their economy, which has been going on for 2 decades.

It is time to wake up.

I yield to my colleague from Arizona.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Ms. MCSALLY. I thank my colleague from Ohio and others here from Florida and Iowa for coming together to talk about this important American issue and national security issue.

I served 26 years in the military. In my last years in service and since then, we have seen the threat of the rise of China. It is a threat to America's security, our jobs, and our role as a leader in the world. They are on a deliberate path to try to dominate the world and shape it into their vision. They need to be stopped.

When I was a cadet at the Air Force Academy, we had an honor code that said: ''I will not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate among us anyone who does.'' China has been lying, cheating, and stealing for far too long. Americans are now waking up to this threat and are resolved to change the trajectory and hold China accountable, but this can't be done by us alone. Our European partners and others in the Pacific and elsewhere need to join with us and also wake up to China's dangerous path and work with us to stop them.

We have been calling this geostrategic shift a return to ''Great Power Competition,'' as if to assume that we are all playing by the same rules. We aren't. China is playing by their own rules and cheating the system for their own gain and power. The Chinese Communist Party is a reckless, predatory adversary that is dedicated to subverting U.S. interests and supplanting our Nation as the world's dominant leader.

Over the past 10 years, China has increased their military spending by 85 percent. Their investment in defense has been used to build their navy, expand their missile stockpile, and emerge as a leader in technologies like hypersonics, cyber warfare, and artificial intelligence.

This buildup has been far from defensive alone. From their illegal maritime claims among several sovereign states, then building artificial islands where they didn't exist before to militarize them in the South China Sea with their maneuvers and exercises that are aggressive and belligerent, to their covert attempts to infiltrate the United States through our universities and stealing our technology, Chinese forces are expanding their tentacles far beyond our borders, to the detriment of American national security interests.

Congress must do our part to respond to this threat. For these reasons, I introduced several pieces of legislation that immediately stopped China from taking advantage of government funds and taxpayer dollars to purchase products and services from Chinese companies with ties to Chinese military.

To end our reliance on China's control and manufacturing of PPE, I introduced legislation to authorize the President to incentivize American companies to produce medical devices, equipment, and drugs.

We saw at the onset of the coronavirus that it was clear that outsourcing the production of PPE to an adversary was wrong and risky. I witnessed firsthand the ingenuity of Arizona companies that stepped up to help fill the gap. That is no excuse for ignoring the fact that we have to bring manufacturing home of vital medical equipment and PPE so that, once again, it is made in America.

Finally, the coronavirus outbreak has taken a catastrophic toll on our country and the world. Make no mistake. The virus began in China and spread globally because the Chinese Government lied about what they knew about it, and they destroyed evidence and silenced doctors and whistleblowers.

Like the rest of the Nation, Arizona has suffered devastating consequences due to this pandemic. Already, we have lost over 2,900 Arizonans, plus the economic toll.

Communist China unleashed this virus on the world, and it should face severe repercussions for their coverups and lies about the origins and spread. China's actions cost lives and devastated the world economy, and it must be held accountable.

I moved to do just that this week by introducing the Civil Justice for Victims of COVID Act. Americans who have been victimized by the lies and deceit of the Communist Party—to include those who lost loved ones, suffered business losses, or personally harmed—deserve the opportunity to hold China accountable and demand just compensation.

I appreciate many of my colleagues joining with me on this legislation. It is due time that we hold China accountable for their malevolent behavior—not just over the past several months but over several decades.

The United States must take immediate action and, with strength, demonstrate that the greatest country in the world will not be taken for a fool. Our Republic and our freedoms that it stands for will allow our country to prevail over China's Communist and rogue agenda. With American will, American innovation, and the American spirit, we will prevail.

I appreciate my colleague from Florida joining as well.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. I want to recognize my colleagues from Arizona, Ohio, Texas, and Iowa for their commitment to holding Communist China accountable and supporting Americans.

I rise today to discuss the threat of Communist China—a threat that poses a huge risk to the national security of the United States, our allies, and the stability of world markets.

Communist China is simply stealing American jobs and technology and spying on our citizens.

General Secretary of the Communist Party Xi is a dictator and a human rights violator who is denying basic rights to the people of Hong Kong, cracking down on dissidents, threatening Taiwan, and militarizing the South China Sea.

Uighur prisoners in Communist China are being rounded up, blindfolded, shaved, and loaded onto trains to be taken to concentration camps simply because of their religion. You can't believe this is happening today in this world.

Communist China's deceptions surrounding the coronavirus pandemic should be the last straw for every American. It doesn't matter to Communist China that their lies and misinformation killed hundreds of thousands of people around the world. Communist China is on a mission to be the dominant world power. Chairman Xi will stop at nothing to grow Communist China's influence. For Communist China and Chairman Xi, this great power conflict is a zero-sum game. In order for China to be stronger, America and all freedom-loving countries around the world must be weaker. We can't allow that to happen. It is time we finally stand up and address the new Cold War occurring between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party.

For too long, Washington politicians have been more concerned with short-term political success than with the long-term threats to our way of life—but not anymore. It is time for action. We can no longer rely on countries like Communist China for our critical supply chain. We need to build up the national stockpile of PPE and our pharmaceutical industry with supplies from American-based producers. We can no longer accept Chinese technology that could be used to spy on us, and we are working to prohibit the Federal Government from purchasing drones from our adversaries.

We can no longer allow Communist China to steal from us. We have to be aggressive in protecting American research and American innovation, including potentially lifesaving research into a coronavirus vaccine. We should do everything we can to stop buying products ''Made in China'' because, every time we do, we are putting another dollar into the pockets of those stealing our technology, denying their people basic human rights, and propping up dangerous dictators like Maduro in Venezuela.

We have to hold Communist China accountable and financially liable for its lies that led to the coronavirus. It is responsible for the devastation. We have to stand up and say that it is wrong to allow Beijing to host the 2022 Olympics. That is wrong. The world community cannot condone or reward its despicable behavior and human rights violations.

It is important to be clear-eyed. We have to see Communist China for what it is. We all must do our part to support our Nation and make it clear to Communist China that the people of the United States will not stand for its behavior.

I will not stop fighting until our future and the futures of all of our children and our grandchildren are secure from this threat.

I yield to my colleague from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise to join my colleagues in discussing the single greatest geopolitical threat facing the United States for the next century, and that is the rise of Communist China.

We are, right now, months into a deadly global pandemic that has sickened over 14 million people worldwide and has taken the lives of over 600,000 people. Why are we in the midst of a global pandemic? It is because the Chinese Communist Party deliberately lied to the world. It covered up the outbreak and allowed it to spread. The coronavirus pandemic has thrown into high relief the fact that China is our most dangerous threat.

For 8 years in the U.S. Senate, I have worked hard to lead the fight to address the threat of Chinese Communist power and aggression and hostility head-on, to make the U.S. economy as free and independent from China as possible, and to thwart the never-ending propaganda and censorship campaign from the Chinese Communists.

Last week, the Chinese Communist Government made the decision to sanction me personally, so I am now—I awoke to discover—prohibited from traveling to Communist China. Somehow, I think I will overcome that great burden, and I will tell you I wear China's sanction as a badge of honor. There is a reason they are lashing out. There is a reason it has decided to direct personal sanctions on me—because they are scared; they are terrified. The Chinese Communists are murdering, lying, torturing tyrants.

For a long time in Washington, there were politicians in both parties—Democrats and Republicans—who were apologists for China, who denied the threat was there, who insisted that the path forward was getting more and more and more in bed with the Chinese Communists. The most significant long-term foreign policy consequence of this global pandemic is that people's eyes are opening up on both sides of the aisle here in Washington and across the world. One need look no further than the United Kingdom's reversing its decision to allow Huawei to build its telecom infrastructure in order to understand how China's mendacity has been revealed to the world.

So how do we hold China accountable? How do we deal with the Chinese Communist Party?

First of all, we should sanction Chinese officials involved in the ongoing suppression of medical experts, of journalists, and of political dissidents, all of whom have been ''disappeared'' by the Chinese tyrants. I have introduced legislation to do just that. Over the past several years, I have introduced, roughly, a dozen separate pieces of legislation that have all focused on different aspects of addressing the China threat.

Another aspect is Chinese propaganda—Chinese propaganda that is reflected here in the United States. Big Business, giant corporations, the media, Hollywood all are terrified to take on Communist China. All see the billions they can earn from access to the Chinese markets as being more important than free speech.

With respect to Hollywood, sadly, too many movie producers here in the United States have been perfectly content to allow the Chinese Communists to censor American movies. For example, later this year, the sequel to ''Top Gun'' is scheduled to come out—''Top Gun,'' one of the greatest military recruiting films ever made. In the sequel, on the back of Maverick's bomber jacket, the flag of Taiwan has been removed and the flag of Japan, both of which the Chinese overlords deemed to be offensive, and our heroic First Amendment champions in Hollywood dutifully complied with censorship.

By the way, it needn't just concern geopolitical affairs in Asia. With another Hollywood movie, ''Bohemian Rhapsody''—a fabulous biopic of Freddie Mercury, the lead singer for Queen—the Chinese censors decided it offended their sensibilities to have scenes in the movie that revealed that Freddie Mercury was homosexual. Now, I ask you to pause for a second and ask: How on Earth do you tell Freddie Mercury's life story without including the fact that he was gay? It was integral to who he was. Yet those in Hollywood, which on so many other issues are glad to be woke social justice warriors, dutifully complied when the Chinese censors said to take it out, and they deleted the scenes from ''Bohemian Rhapsody.''

I have introduced legislation in this body called the SCRIPT Act that will impose consequences when American companies allow the Chinese Government to censor our films. The consequences are simple. We don't have the power as the government to impose direct negative consequences, but what we do have the power to do is to use the incentives we have; namely, lots of movies borrow Federal assets. When you go watch a movie and see a plane or a ship or a tank or when you go watch a movie on the border and you see DHS assets, all sorts of Federal agencies allow movies to use equipment that is the property of the Federal Government. The SCRIPT Act is very simple. It says, if you are going to allow the Chinese Communists to censor your movie, the Federal Government is not going to loan you our equipment and materiel. We are not going to facilitate making a movie if you are going to give the Chinese Communists the editing and censoring pen.

Not only do the Chinese Communists engage in propaganda in Hollywood, but they also engage in espionage and propaganda on our university campuses—a very deliberate, systematic effort to steal and deceive. In the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, I was proud to secure a funding prohibition for the Department of Defense from funding universities where the money could go to a Confucius Institute. As a result of that bipartisan legislation, which earned support from Republicans and Democrats, 17 Confucius Institutes have been shut down.

When it comes to our supply chain, we have seen, in recent months, the incredible foolishness of allowing the American supply chain to be dependent on China—medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, PPE. In the midst of this pandemic, one Chinese Government state-controlled newspaper explicitly threatened to cut off lifesaving pharmaceuticals to the United States of America as a tool of economic warfare. If it were to do that, that wouldn't just be economic warfare—that would be actual warfare. That is literally threatening the lives of millions of Americans.

We need to break our supply chain dependence on China, especially concerning critical infrastructure, and I have introduced hosts of legislation designed to do so with respect to pharmaceuticals, with respect to critical minerals. We have to keep the American people's lives and safety not dependent upon the whims of Communist China.

In my final point right now, in China today, there are, roughly, 1 million Uighurs in concentration camps—an Orwellian-style, dystopian government, where the government has all power to monitor what you say, to monitor whom you talk to, to monitor your beliefs. I introduced legislation to impose sanctions on any American technology companies that facilitate the monitoring and oppression of the Chinese people. I am proud to say the Trump administration took major portions of that legislation I introduced and implemented them to increase the pressure to stop facilitating Chinese torture and oppression.

The overwhelming challenge for this body and for this country for the next century going forward is how we will stand up to the threat of China. China is waging a 1,000-year war. For the sake not only of Americans but for the sake of the free world, America needs to win this contest.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I was thinking a bit earlier today about what we were doing at this time last year. We were busy hosting Tennessee Tuesdays and welcoming Tennesseans and families and children with such curiosity and bright eyes and lots of questions about our Nation's government, about these beautiful buildings in which we work every day, and about the job that we have in representing them. I like that curiosity, and I like that energy that, generally, is brought to our Chambers and to our work during the summertime. This year, things really are a little bit different. I think it is a very worthwhile exercise—and I appreciate that my colleagues are participating in this exercise—to remind ourselves why this year is different.

The answer, of course, as to why is this year different is the Chinese Communist Party. It is the one that is to be held responsible, to be blamed for the sickness, the chaos, for this crisis that we have had, which is a health, food, and financial crisis all rolled into one. It has happened because of decisions that China made, decisions that were made by the Chinese Communist Party's leadership.

There are some things that are the known knowns, if you will. They are the things that we know happened as you look back over what has happened with COVID–19.

What we know is this: On December 31, 2019, government officials in Wuhan, China, confirmed they were monitoring the spread of a disease that looked a lot like pneumonia. They didn't know exactly what it was. It didn't have all the markers, but a lot. But on New Year's Eve, they let us know: Hey, we have a problem out here. Just days later, they confirmed it was caused by a novel virus that had infected dozens of people. We now know it was hundreds of people.

It wasn't until January 23, however, that authorities shut off Wuhan from the rest of the country. By this time, the virus was spreading like wildfire. Let's pay close attention to what I just said. They shut off Hubei Province, they shut off Wuhan not from the rest of the world, not from other countries, but from the rest of China. Don't you dare go anywhere else in our country. This is contagious.

Now, as if that 23-day gap wasn't bad enough, credible watchdog reports revealed that the CCP—Chinese Communist Party—lied—they lied to global health officials about the danger posed by the virus for not just a day or two while they figured it out but for 51 days before they sounded the alarm and said: Listen up. Pandemic. Pandemic. Fifty-one days. This deception allowed a regional outbreak to spread into a global pandemic that has so far killed more than 140,000 Americans.

It would be easy to chalk all of this up to incompetence and overwhelmed bureaucrats, but every Member of this body knows that is not what happened. That is why, over the past few weeks, more and more of my colleagues here in the Senate have agreed to support legislation that will allow Americans to hold China accountable for the destruction caused by the pandemic.

On Monday, Senator MCSALLY introduced the Civil Justice for Victims of COVID Act—a bill that I am very pleased to support and to be a cosponsor. This bill contains elements of my Stop COVID Act, which I introduced earlier this year. It would strip Chinese officials of their sovereign immunity for reckless actions that caused the pandemic and would give our Federal courts the authority to hear claims that China has caused or contributed to the COVID–19 pandemic. This is not an unusual step. We did this after 9/11 for the 9/11 families. What we would do is give them the opportunity to go to court and make their case—hold China accountable.

It is time for this body to reject the artificial backstops that some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle use to protect China from criticism, and I encourage those colleagues to ask themselves: What are you afraid will happen if we hold China accountable for what they have done? What do you fear?

We have known for years that Beijing uses every tool in its toolbox to spy on us. Look at what we have learned about Huawei. They embed the chips in the hardware. You do not know they are there until they activate. We know they steal our intellectual property. Look at what they have done to the music industry, to the entertainment industry, to publishers, and to automotive engineers. China—they can't innovate their way to success, so what do they do? They steal their way to success, and then they lie about it.

China continues to cause chaos on the international stage. Look at their work pushing into the South China Sea. Look at what they have done to the freedom fighters in Hong Kong. Look at how they act and how they pressure and try to stifle Taiwan. This is standard operating procedure for the Chinese Communist Party.

Now, because they chose to lie and not come forward, we have more than 140,000 Americans who are dead. Millions more have lost their jobs, and they have lost their sense of community. How much further are we willing to let this go? I will tell you this: As I, every single day, talk to Tennesseans about China and what has happened with China and how China has not been an honest broker, not only in this but for decades, Tennesseans have had enough.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, the world is watching and dealing with COVID–19—the economic effects and health effects. It has affected every single one of our families in some way.

While the world is watching and we are dealing with all those issues here in the United States, we can't lose track of what is happening on the world stage because China is using this moment when the world is distracted to push its way into Hong Kong and to break its word.

When we deal with China, we know what they have done, the predatory tactics they have taken either on their own people or on countries around the world.

The United States of America—when we do foreign aid, we go help other countries gain more freedom, more security, more stability, and more economic growth. We don't ask anything in return. We engage with them to help them.

China is working with developing countries around the world by moving into different countries and taking collateral of their ports, of their airports, and establishing military bases around the world when poorer countries default on the loans they give them. They are not helping other countries; they are taking over other countries.

They are stepping into country after country and offering them great new technology from Huawei to help their cell phone systems. They are establishing security systems around their banks. But what they are really doing is monitoring their people and gathering data on people all around the world. The security systems aren't there to set up and prop up dictatorships in poor countries; they are there for the dictatorship of China to track what is going on there and any international development.

We should be aware of what China is doing, and we should not ignore this moment for the free people of Hong Kong.

Today, many Americans are aware of how China has handled the issue of protective equipment. The medical equipment that we desperately needed in March, April, May—much of it manufactured in China—we could not get because the Communist Government of China kept the materials from American companies that were manufacturing in China. The Chinese Communist Government wouldn't allow the exportation of that, and they just took that equipment over, putting all of the schedules behind. Suddenly, Americans woke up and understood that our supply chains are at risk. Our pharmaceutical supply chains are at risk, and our PPE supply chains are at risk.

What many people don't know is that our rare earth minerals and critical minerals supply chain is at risk. Lots of folks really like the solar panels and electric car batteries. Well, great—except we are completely dependent on China for the rare earth minerals that are in those.

If we don't develop our own sourcing for those rare earth minerals—and we do have those same rare earth minerals here—if we don't develop our own supply chain, if we don't develop our own manufacturing for pharmaceuticals and for the precursors of pharmaceuticals, we will continue to be vulnerable to the Chinese Government, and at the moment the Communist government determines, they will take over that supply, and we will be at risk.

For decades, the Confucius Institutes have thrived on college campuses, spreading a Communist philosophy all through our college campuses. It is now at a moment that college campuses and leadership in colleges are starting to wake up to say: Why are we allowing Communist indoctrination on our campuses?

It is a bill that I have pushed, that I will continue to push to be able to wake up our universities, to say: Why are we allowing this on our campus?

It is an issue that I have pushed for years, dealing with Chinese Communists spying on American technology, stealing technology, and also stealing our science and inventions.

They come over with a grant from the United States and say they are going to send over researchers, when really what they are doing is harvesting the research and taking it back to China.

They take materials, whether it be music or movies or any items of production, and all that manufacturing that comes to China, they then take that same technology, move it to a different factory, and literally compete against the first company, because to do business in China, you have to turn over all your intellectual property to the Communist government, which then takes it and uses it on their own.

The Chinese Communist Government is not the ally of freedom for the world, and we should be aware of that. Certainly the people of Hong Kong are aware of that.

In 1997, after 150 years as a British territory, Hong Kong became a part of China under the Joint Declaration. It was one country, two systems—that Hong Kong for 50 years would remain autonomous and free.

Well, just over two decades later, the Chinese Government has broken its promise, and Hong Kong is no longer free. While the world is consumed with what is happening with COVID–19, the Communist government has moved into Hong Kong and has taken it over. They passed a law in Beijing that they

sent over and declared in Hong Kong that they can't have any of what they call subversion, organization or perpetuation of what they call terroristic activities, collusion with a foreign country or an external element, which I will explain later.

This new security law literally was delivered to the people of Hong Kong at midnight, and it went into place immediately. Then the next step was that the Chinese Communist police—military law enforcement—moved into Hong Kong to begin to implement this.

Free speech immediately stopped. Those protesters who were out on the street just wishing to be able to vote and to speak their mind were immediately rounded up.

Teachers and academics have been arrested or fired or threatened. Communist Chinese leaders have contacted them to reprimand them about teaching about human rights in their classrooms, remembering that in Hong Kong it was required—it was a required class in Hong Kong just weeks ago—to learn about human rights and freedom, and now the Chinese Government is removing those teachers and threatening any other teacher who teaches about human rights that they will be removed.

Faith leaders have been squashed. You see, under this security law that has passed, you can't have any external element collusion. They define ''external element'' as any kind of worship of God as well that does not align with the Communist Government. So any faith-based group who is there in Hong Kong is immediately being squashed.

The Muslim Uighurs are gathered up in Communist China and put in concentration camps to reeducate them on how to be more Chinese. Now the people of Hong Kong are experiencing that same type of oppression as the first step has stepped in to take away their right to free speech, their right to gather and protest, and now also their right to have freedom of faith. Leaders of the democracy movement have already been rounded up and arrested. This is something that we should not ignore. We have said as a world ''Never again,'' and we should engage.

I know many people in my State say we should focus on COVID–19, and we should. There is much that needs to be done. We cannot take our eyes off of freedom around the world, as well, and the people of Hong Kong. As they lose their freedom, the world loses freedom, and China sees it can move into one more place one more time. Taiwan is next, and they will continue to move in this same way. We should stay engaged.

There are multiple bills this body has already done on sanctions, and we should continue. We should continue to press in and speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves in Hong Kong. They are being isolated. Senator TIM KAINE and I just dropped a bill yesterday dealing with internet freedom for the people of Hong Kong, saying that the American Government should be engaged in trying to break through what is called the great firewall in China. We know they will extend this firewall into Hong Kong, as well, and will prevent the people from Hong Kong from access to social media, information with each other, or information from the outside world, just as they have with the people of China. But the people of Hong Kong have grown up and lived in freedom, and they know what it means to get outside information, and the Chinese Government is actively working to shut that down. We should actively work to push back on that to make sure the free people of Hong Kong continue to communicate with each other and with the outside world. We can stay engaged with that basic function of human rights. That is why Senator KAINE and I are so passionate about this.

We should engage as a government to make sure that they can continue to have the free speech that we have. When anyone loses their human rights and dignities, the world loses human rights and dignities.

Again, I am aware that there are many things that need to happen with COVID–19 right now, and we are actively working on those things as well, and we should. But we should not lose track of freedom. Freedom is our responsibility to model and to live and to help other free people to guard. Let's stand with the people of Hong Kong.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3627

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I am glad to have the opportunity to talk for a bit on the floor of the U.S. Senate on U.S. policy toward China because there has been no better friend for Chinese interests likely in our lifetime than President Donald J. Trump.

Articles suggest that when you survey Chinese Communist Party leaders, they are, to a person, rooting for the reelection of this President. I don't need to go through the litany of ways in which China has become more influential and more powerful all around the world because of this administration's policies, but at the top of that list is the abdication of the United States' traditional leadership role on human rights, which has allowed the Communist Party to march on the Uighurs and others. It is a failed trade policy that has allowed China to extend its influence into places like Africa and throughout the Silk Road. It is America's break with Europe that has shattered our ability to negotiate together the future rules of the economic order.

But what China is really ecstatic about is this President's performance since March in the wake of a virus that now shows the United States as having 25 percent of the world's COVID cases while having only 4 percent of the world's population.

My friend Senator BLACKBURN recited the early moments of this virus outbreak in China, and she is right that China was nontransparent and unhelpful in those early days. But do you know who the greatest cheerleader for China was in the first 2 to 3 months of COVID–19's outbreak there? President Donald Trump. On 45 occasions he went on social media or gave statements to the press in which he lauded China's response. He talked about how transparent they were and how they were doing a great job. The world community couldn't put pressure on China to open up with respect to what they knew about the virus in large part because the leader of the Nation's most powerful country was doing the bidding of the Chinese Government.

The second thing that this President has done that makes China very, very pleased is to essentially make the argument for the Chinese that the autocratic model that they are perfecting is the best method by which to organize society around the world, because they say: Listen, we got this virus under control in a matter of months, and the world's greatest democracy is still dealing with an epidemic that looks to be raging newly out of control. So as we engage in this broad fight between models of governance, our inability—this administration's inability—to get this virus under control is maybe the greatest gift that this President has given to China.

Here is what makes it so unconscionable: We know that democracy is inefficient. We know that capital markets can sometimes be inefficient when pressed up against the wall by emergencies. So we built into the statutes of the United States emergency powers to give to this President—to any President—so that when they are faced with an emergency, they can cure some of the inefficiencies of democracy.

We are on the floor today—Senators BALDWIN, STABENOW, BROWN, and I—to talk about one particular power this President has. It is an act called the Defense Production Act, and it allows the President during moments of emergency to commandeer parts of the manufacturing supply chain in this country to make sure we are making everything we need in order to repel a foreign invader. Sometimes that may be an army, but in this case it is a pathogen.

What we have known from the very beginning is that there was no way for this country to have enough personal protective equipment—masks, face shields, gowns, and gloves—and there was no way for this country to be able to have enough tests to know who has it so that we can track it and get rid of it without the Federal Government stepping up and utilizing the Defense Production Act.

Twenty percent of nursing homes today have less than a week's supply of PPE.

Doctors at one hospital in Houston, where the outbreak is raging out of control, are being told to wear their N95 masks for 15 days in a row when it is recommended for a single use.

The national strategic stockpile once had 82 million gloves. Today they have less than 1 million.

Guess what. It is going to get worse. More people need to be tested. Schools are about to reopen. The superintendent of the 100,000-student Jefferson County school district in Louisville, KY, says that he needs $10 million to order face masks alone. It is going to cost schools across this country $25 billion to purchase medical supplies, and these medical supplies are going up in price because the supply is so low. We have a solution: the Defense Production Act.

We also don't have enough tests. It now takes 7 to 10 to 14 days to get a test back. In Connecticut, it used to take just 1 day. You can't beat this virus if you don't get results for 7 to 10 days. That person who gets tested goes out and spreads it during that time.

James Davis from Quest Diagnostics said:

> We would double our capacity tomorrow . . . but it's not the labs that are the bottleneck. [It] is our ability to get physical machines and . . . our ability to feed those machines with chemical reagents.

That is equipment that could be produced in the United States if the President took control of the manufacturing supply chain—not forever, but to the extent of this crisis.

So the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act, which Senator BALDWIN and my colleagues will talk more about, essentially picks up the ball the President has dropped and commands the President to operationalize the Defense Production Act and put somebody in charge of its effectuation to make sure we are producing in this country all of the medical equipment—the masks, the gloves, the testing reagents, the cartridges—that it is possible to produce in this Nation.

The level of gleeful, willing, knowing, purposeful incompetence from this administration is absolutely stunning, and no one should normalize an administration that has the power to save lives and refuses to operationalize it.

Why won't this administration take control of the supply chain? Why are they willing to let people die? States can't run the supply chain by themselves. It is a national and international supply chain. Hospitals can't create their own supply chain. They need to be focused on saving lives, not being miniprocurement organizations.

We know that democracies and capitalist economies are by nature and design often inefficient when faced with these urgent crises. That is why we give Presidents these enormous but temporary powers to smooth out the inefficiencies of a multibranch, multijurisdictional democracy.

When it comes to calling in the Federal troops to beat the hell out of protesters, this President seems perfectly willing to exercise his powers as Commander in Chief, but when it comes to making sure that my kids' teachers or my local doctor has a mask this fall, this President is all of a sudden impotent. It falls to us, Members of the U.S. Congress, to stand up and pass legislation, the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act, to make sure—to make sure—that we are using the extent of the statutes provided to this government and this President to make sure that people are safe and make sure people are tested in the middle of an ongoing epidemic.

I am glad to be joined on the floor today by a number of my colleagues to talk about the need to pass this legislation. We are going to offer a unanimous consent request. Senator BALDWIN will do that. I have been very pleased to be a partner with her in developing this legislation to require the operationalization of the DPA, but before she speaks, let me turn it over to my colleague and our caucus's leader on issues of healthcare, Senator STABENOW.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, it is wonderful to be here with my great friends from Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Ohio. This is such an important discussion we are having today and such an important bill that needs to be passed.

Let me start again by underscoring something that Senator MURPHY said, because despite what happened in the beginning as it relates to China and certainly over the years, I have not been shy to address concerns related to stealing our intellectual property rights or other issues related to China. The reality is, despite whatever the smokescreens are about China, you can't say that they are the reason that with 4 percent of the population, we have 25 percent of the cases of COVID–19 and 25 percent of the deaths in the world. There is much more to it, and, unfortunately, it lands right in this country with the lack of national leadership that has been completely AWOL when it comes to the kind of national strategy we need to get our people the equipment, the support they need, the testing they need, and to have a strategy to safely reopen the economy and our schools while, at the same time, putting the health and safety and lives of Americans first by addressing the pandemic.

So I rise today to urge the Senate to take up and immediately pass the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act. I want to thank Senators BALDWIN, MURPHY, and BROWN for introducing this important legislation. I am very proud to be an original cosponsor of this bill.

As all of you know, throughout history—and I love history—perhaps no State was as crucial to our Nation's victory in World War II as was Michigan. My colleagues may debate that, but I have the mic, so I will talk about Michigan.

The truth is that more than half of Michigan men and women proudly served in uniform, including my own dad. Back home, the people of our State were hard at work producing the bombers, the tanks, the trucks, the helmets, and the guns needed to win the war. In fact, Michigan was called at that time ''the arsenal of democracy.'' We make things, and during World War II, we were making the things that were needed to win the war—the arsenal of democracy. Both at home and abroad, victory in many ways depended on the people of my State.

For the past 6 months, our Nation has been fighting a different kind of war, a raging health pandemic, taking over 141,000 American lives so far. Unfortunately, this time our national generals appear to be missing in action. How is it possible that 6 months after the first case of COVID–19 on January 20, our healthcare workers still are struggling to get the personal protective gear they need to treat patients while keeping themselves safe? How can that be?

How is it possible that 6 months after the first case of COVID–19 was detected in the United States, people are still struggling to get tested? Well, I will tell you how. It is because of the complete lack of Federal leadership coming from this White House that we have seen, since day one, in this crisis.

None of us want it to be this way. We all live here. Our families are here. We are desperately concerned about our families, our friends, and people in our States. We want this White House to be successful in fighting the pandemic. We all need to be successful in fighting this pandemic.

But the reality is that the administration could have immediately used the Defense Production Act to ensure that we have quality protective equipment and testing supplies in the right place at the right time. It could have happened immediately. Instead, we have the administration providing example after example of telling the Governors: OK, you do it. We don't want to do it. You do it. We will be right behind you.

Then Governors turn around, and nobody is there.

They don't want to support the Governors and local communities now that we were once required to step up. But you go ahead. Or they are putting together shady contracts—no-bid contracts—one after the other.

One I will mention to you is called Fillakit, which was a $10 million no-bid contract to produce testing supplies by somebody who already had had problems in the past and who was given a no-bid contract after setting up a new company. We heard this over and over. And ProPublica reported that the testing tubes Fillakit produced were, in fact, repurposed miniature plastic soda bottles and described the packaging process as unmasked employees using ''snow shovels'' and dumping them into plastic bins before squirting saline into them all in open air. Well, Michigan received some of those so-called testing supplies, and needless to say, they were not useable.

Meanwhile, Governors, hospitals, and nursing homes have spent time, energy, and money bidding against one another and being pitted against one another for lifesaving PPE and testing supplies. This is no way to fight a pandemic. This is no way to fight a war, and, certainly, no way to win a war.

In Michigan, after the CARES Act passed, going back to the State, working with our State Governor and her team and our delegation, I, literally, was in a situation of reaching out—because of my work in healthcare—to people in the medical supply business, and we got some of the first masks because I knew a guy who knew a guy who knew a guy in China. That was how we got the masks—no national supply chain.

Masks were coming in. Fifty-cent masks were being bumped up to $5, $6, $7 apiece—no accountability, nobody worrying about the United States and whether we could get the best deal and whether our hospitals were able to get what they needed. Frankly, it was chaos—complete chaos. Again, that is no way to fight a pandemic, and it is certainly no way to fight a war.

During World War II, Michigan didn't decide to become the arsenal of democracy on its own. The Federal Government saw a need and called on Michigan companies and workers to fill it, and we did. It is the same thing this administration should be doing right now, today—today—to produce the PPE and testing supplies we need to end this pandemic. Instead, doctors and nurses are wearing the same masks for a week or more. People are waiting more than 10 days for test results, and more than 141,000 Americans, so far, have died, including more than 6,100 in Michigan.

It is time to pass this important bill. It is past time. It is time to put our great American companies to work producing the supplies we need. It is time to win this war. We have done big things before, and we can do it again. I join with my colleagues in urging that this bill be taken up immediately.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank Senators MURPHY and STABENOW and Senator BALDWIN's terrific leadership on this. I echo Senator MURPHY's earlier comments about China.

I see on the other side of the aisle Senators and President Trump. It is campaign season. So it is time to bash China, even though they have been in the pockets of China.

I was in the other body when corporate interests came and lobbied the House of Representatives and lobbied the Senate asking for China to get all of these trade breaks and tax breaks so that American companies could shut down production in Milwaukee or in Cleveland and move overseas to China and get all kinds of tax breaks. And then my Republican colleagues were also pro-China because they wanted these American corporations and their contributors, starting with Senator MCCONNELL down the hall, to get all of these advantages for China.

Now, if you are thinking about running for President of the United States in 2024 as a Republican, you bash China. If you are in a tough reelection right now for the Senate, you bash China. If you are a House Member and afraid of being defeated, you bash China. If you want to help the cause for Donald Trump, you bash China. It doesn't matter that President Trump has been the best friend of China. It doesn't matter the Republican leadership has been in the pocket of Chinese Communist interests because of their support for American corporations. It is just good politics to bash China. So we know that, and Senator MURPHY touched on that.

S. 4049

Mr. President, I want to say a few words first about Agent Orange and thank Senator TESTER for his work on behalf of the tens of thousands of Vietnam vets who suffered because of exposure to Agent Orange.

We all know what the issue is. The National Academy of Sciences has recognized the four illnesses that are suggestive or where there is sufficient evidence associated with Agent Orange. For years, we have known that. The VA has added illnesses in categories to the list of presumptive medical conditions associated with Agent Orange. They have resisted this.

Time is running out for these veterans. We did this to them. The American Government decided to spray Agent Orange. We knew it was harmful. We definitely know it is harmful now. If you were exposed to poison while serving our country, you deserve the benefits you earned, period.

For 3 years, in the Veterans' Affairs Committee—I sat in the Veterans' Affairs Committee—I begged the Veterans' Administration to recognize that these three illnesses are caused by Agent Orange and they should get Veterans' Administration benefits. I begged the Veterans' Administration, and no answers. I begged the President of the United States, and President Trump said he is a friend of veterans, but he couldn't be bothered to add these three illnesses on the list. So these veterans, individually, have to get down on their knees—figuratively, if not literally—and beg the VA for benefits when it ought to be automatic. That is what Senator TESTER's amendment does today. It makes it automatic.

Instead, the White House said no and the Veterans' Administration said no, but because of the work of Senator TESTER today, my colleagues are finally—it doesn't happen often around here. My Republican colleagues actually stood up to the President of the United States and said: No, Mr. President, you are wrong on the VA about covering these illnesses for Vietnam vets. And, finally, this Congress did the right thing. I thank Senator TESTER for that work.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3627

Mr. President, we know a lot of things. We know 144,000 Americans are dead. We have grown numb to these numbers. We can't forget who they are. They are our friends, our sisters, our brothers, our parents, and our neighbors.

As has been said, we are 4 to 5 percent of the world's population. We have accounted for almost 30 percent of the deaths in the entire world. That is not because we don't have skilled doctors. It is not because we don't have smart scientists. It is not because we don't work hard. It is because of leadership.

We know this President and the majority leader down the hall, who does the bidding every single day of this President, had chance after chance to get ahead of this virus. President Trump failed and Senator MCCONNELL failed. Now they have stopped even pretending to try.

The President demands that schools reopen—no plan to protect teachers and students. He demands businesses open up—no plan to protect workers and consumers. The American people have done their part and made incredible sacrifices. Essentially, they bought President Trump time in March, April, May, and June, and he wasted it.

This spring, people stayed home. They worked hard to flatten the curve. Members of both parties—both parties—begged him to use the Defense Production Act to scale up the production of medical supplies, including testing supplies, and coordinate their deployment. All the way back in March, we knew we faced shortfalls in N95 masks, gowns, and the materials we needed, most importantly, for test production, like cotton swabs. I immediately convened Ohio manufacturers back in March. I know Senator BALDWIN did the same thing in her State. I asked them what support they needed. I released a plan and sent a letter to the White House outlining Executive actions the President could take immediately. This was March. Since then—April, May, June, July—and essentially nothing happened. The Federal Government can acquire the resources our country needs and send them when they are needed most.

Senator CRAPO, a Republican from Idaho, and I worked together to include provisions in the CARES Act ensuring the President has the ability to use DPA authority he already has without delay. We worked with our colleagues in the Appropriations Committee to include $1 billion in new DPA funding. Yet hundreds of millions of dollars just sit around waiting to be used.

Our States and our healthcare workers continue to face supply shortages. What exactly is the President waiting for? Imagine if he had used that DPA money and DPA authority in the spring and said we need to be producing a million tests a week by the end of summer, or imagine if we said our goal

is to be ready to open schools in the fall and I am calling on American businesses and American workers to manufacture the tests we need to do it? Look around the world. Other countries figured this out. We are being left behind. It is time for us to step up. If the President will not lead, we must. If the President will not use DPA on its own, Congress must use its authority to force him to.

That is why it is so disappointing to see my Republican colleagues objecting to Senator BALDWIN's bill. But, of course, they are objecting because they are doing the bidding of President Trump, and they want to blame China for everything, instead of take any responsibility themselves. But objecting to Senator BALDWIN's bill, which would force the President to actually do his job and coordinate a national response to a national crisis—that is the answer.

The American people should not have to fend for themselves again and again and again in the middle of a pandemic.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, President Trump's response to this pandemic has been a failure of leadership. So we are here today to provide leadership in the Senate to do what the Trump administration has failed to do.

In April, with my good friend Senator MURPHY from Connecticut, the two of us introduced legislation called the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act. That act would force President Trump to take action and scale up American production of things like test kits, swabs, reagents, personal protective equipment, and the medical equipment needed at the local level to address the ongoing COVID–19 pandemic in our country.

Three months later, States still do not have the supplies they need. Now more than 3.8 million Americans have been infected with the coronavirus, and, tragically, over 141,000 people have died in our country. For 3 months, our legislation has been in the majority leader's legislative graveyard.

Since this public health crisis started, the Trump administration has had no national testing plan, and they have never had a plan to provide States with the testing supplies they need to combat this pandemic. As a matter of fact, last month, the President said we needed to slow down testing, and, this weekend, as President Trump once again said the coronavirus would disappear, there were reports that the White House is trying to block Federal funding for States to conduct testing and contact tracing.

President Trump has not only abandoned each and every one of our States, he has also turned his back on frontline healthcare workers, who continue to face shortages of personal protective equipment, including gloves, gowns, face shields, and masks.

The Trump administration has created absolute chaos in the medical supply chain, leaving healthcare workers at hospitals and long-term care facilities at the forefront of this crisis to fend for themselves, rationing the scarce personal protective equipment that has been provided to them. In fact, just a couple of weeks ago, Vice President MIKE PENCE, who was put in charge of our pandemic response, said the administration will be issuing guidance encouraging healthcare workers to reuse personal protective equipment. This is the same Vice President who declared that the United States would ''have this coronavirus pandemic behind us'' by Memorial Day weekend. He was tragically wrong, and this White House continues to play catchup on a pandemic and a virus that is spreading faster than ever.

The person whom President Trump put in charge of our medical supply chain was his son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Jared Kushner predicted in April that by June we would be back to normal and that in July we would be ''rocking again.'' It is July. It is July, and this is where we are.

Last Thursday, America had its highest number of new coronavirus cases in 1 day. And in my home State of Wisconsin, we had our highest case count ever yesterday—yesterday—and we have many hospitals across my State with less than a week's supply of face shields, goggles, gowns, paper medical masks, and N95 masks.

This public health crisis has not disappeared. We are not back to normal, and we are not ''rocking again.''

The fact is, President Trump has failed to lead, and this White House has taken us in a wrong direction in our fight against this pandemic. New coronavirus cases are rising in the States that we work for, which means we need more testing supplies, more testing, and more personal protective equipment for our workers.

The question this Senate needs to answer is whether we are going to let this President continue to take our country in the wrong direction, or are we going to lead and do what we all know needs to be done?

Not one of my Senate colleagues can make an honest case that their State has everything it needs to fight this pandemic.

In Wisconsin, we have been shortchanged by this administration. They have failed to provide adequate supplies for our State's clinical and private labs, paralyzing our ability to expand testing to the levels we need. In some cases, what we have received from the Trump administration were unsuitable and unusable testing supplies—foam applicators that cannot be used for swabs and saline tubes that were too short to transport swabs used in the majority of COVID–19 tests.

In addition, the majority of labs conducting COVID–19 tests in Wisconsin are clinical or private labs. These labs cannot access resources from the administration and are essentially being told to ''figure it out.'' Over 80 Wisconsin labs that are currently performing tests do not have access to a consistent supply of reagent.

We are not alone. States across the country have been abandoned by the Trump administration. They have been forced to go this alone, while President Trump has tried to pass off responsibility for his own failures.

Every single one of us knows that our States need more resources and supplies so we can ramp up testing, identify those who are infected, isolate positive cases, and safely trace all contacts so that the spread of this virus can finally be contained. We all know that President Trump's broken supply chain has been a failure, and my legislation with Senator MURPHY, supported by 46 Democrats, will help fix it.

In order to put people back to work and safely reopen businesses and schools, we need both a national testing plan and the supplies to implement it. This is true in Wisconsin and every other State in our Nation.

Our legislation will help respond to this public health crisis and prepare for the future by mobilizing a Federal response to increase our national production of the testing and medical supplies we need at the State and local level. Specifically, the bill will provide critical oversight of the distribution of medical supplies and put an expert in charge to oversee COVID–19 equipment production and delivery so we know we are putting science and facts over politics and private distributor profits when it comes to responding to this pandemic.

Finally, our legislation unlocks the full authority and power of the Defense Production Act so that we can produce and deliver tests, testing supplies, personal protective equipment, and medical equipment that we need to take on this pandemic, treat patients, protect workers, open businesses and schools, and save lives.

My friends on the other side of the aisle have a choice: They can continue to ignore President Trump's failure to respond to this public health crisis, knowing full well that until we confront it in the bold and effective way that we should, we will not solve our economic crisis, or they can choose to liberate themselves from this failure and support a solution that will serve the people who sent us here to work for them.

If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle believe, as this Vice President does, that this pandemic is behind us, then object. If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle believe, as Jared Kushner does, that we are rocking again in July, then object. If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle believe, as President Trump does, that the coronavirus will just magically disappear, well, then, object.

If you oppose the failures of this President and this administration in responding to the COVID–19 pandemic, then I ask for your vote to pass the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act today.

So I ask unanimous consent that the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 3627, the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act. 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. JOHNSON. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, let me say first that I appreciate my colleague from Wisconsin's work on this issue. It is an important issue. It is one that our committee has been working diligently on.

Since the beginning of the COVID crisis, we have held five hearings and a roundtable on exactly this issue—exploring and doing oversight on the national stockpile and its supply chain vulnerability. Just today, we marked up five pieces of legislation very similar to what my colleague from Wisconsin is introducing here and trying to pass by unanimous consent. The five pieces are the Federal Emergency Pandemic Response Act, Securing Healthcare Response and Equipment Act, National Response Framework Improvement Act, National Infrastructure Simulation and Analysis Center Pandemic Modeling Act, and finally—this one closest to my colleague's bill—the PPE Supply Chain Transparency Act, which is actually the piece of legislation we have had the most discussion on—two amendments, including a second-degree amendment to one amendment—before passing it unanimously. So our committee has done a lot of work.

My concern about what my colleague is doing here—trying to pass this by unanimous consent—is by and large bypassing the committee process. It is true her staff reached out to my staff a couple of weeks ago. We asked, have you vetted it through the Department? Apparently, she has begun that process, but this piece of legislation has not been properly vetted. It has not gone through the proper and full committee process.

Again, without expressing an opinion on a piece of legislation but also acknowledging the fact that our committee has done a lot of work—passed five pieces of legislation on a nonpartisan basis today because we are concerned about this as well—I have to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. I am, of course, very disappointed that we cannot move this forward.

I want to respond to a couple of the comments made by my colleagues from the State of Wisconsin, the chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee.

It is July. It is July, and cases are rising. Action was not taken in February, March, April, May, June, or so far in this month of July. We had more than fair warning that we had shortages of masks and gloves and gowns and face shields and testing swabs and testing media and reagents, and yet it is July.

As I said earlier, yesterday Wisconsin announced the most cases positive for coronavirus in a single day that we have seen since the pandemic began.

As we strive to reopen our economy, the President exhorts all schools to hold 5-day-a-week, in-person classes.

We know that the demand for testing and the demand for masks will only increase exponentially—the need to keep workers safe as they return to work and the need to keep customers safe as they enter and engage in commerce. To say that this needed to happen back in February is an understatement.

I am pleased that my colleague has held hearings, but this bill was filed in April when it became apparent that the President was not going to act. This bill has been available for committee review since April.

The House passed many elements of the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act in their Heroes Act, which they passed 2 months ago. I just ask, where would we be today had this been put into law?

There has been time to review. There has been time to study. But it is past time to pass the Medical Supply Transparency and Delivery Act. I hope we can create another opportunity for the Senate to act on this in the days to come because it is so overdue.

I want to again thank my colleagues who joined me on the floor this afternoon—my coauthor, Senator CHRIS MURPHY of Connecticut; my colleague from Michigan, DEBBIE STABENOW; and my colleague from Ohio, Senator SHERROD BROWN; and the 45 other Members of the U.S. Senate who have joined me in sponsoring this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleagues, Senators BALDWIN and MURPHY, for their urgent words on this most important issue. I am proud to join them as we seek passage to pass legislation to finally require the President to invoke the full authority of the DPA, the Defense Production Act, so that the Federal Government can more speedily get testing supplies and PPE to the parts of our country struggling under the weight of the pandemic.

Make no mistake, medical professionals and frontline workers fighting this virus still—still—do not have the protective equipment and the testing supplies they need because the Trump administration failed to fully invoke the DPA earlier this year. This is a crisis of President Trump's making.

As we speak, COVID–19 continues to surge across the country. As cases keep growing, our testing supplies and our PPE, already in short supply, are reaching critical levels. From Seattle to Miami, people are waiting in line for hours to get tested, and their results might take days, if not more, to come back. In many places we are missing basic supplies—swabs, gloves. In certain hospitals it has been reported doctors and nurses are being told to reuse their N95 masks as many as 15—15—times.

It has been 6 months since we have been fighting this virus. How is this still happening? The problem should have been solved months ago, but the President has been derelict in his duty. His administration has been a total failure when it comes to testing and PPE.

Instead of fully invoking the DPA and ramping up the production of critical supplies early on, President Trump has left doctors, nurses, and medical staff fighting this disease with one hand tied behind their back. He has failed to keep us and those working on the frontline safe.

This bill, however, would finally—finally—force the President to do what he should have done ages ago. We have been talking about the DPA since way back in April. I called the President in April, got him on the phone, urged him to invoke it. He told me he would and then contradicted himself a few hours later. How typical, but how devastating for the American people. Then he quickly lost interest—again, typical of this President, whose attention span is much too short for the big fight that we have with COVID.

So what we say is the President's approach to the pandemic was—typically here—no followthrough, no strategy, no comprehension of the problem. The President's mind-boggling refusal to invoke the DPA shouldn't be piled on top of the challenges our medical workers and citizens already face.

I am sorry we didn't pass this legislation. I hope we can do it soon.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

REMEMBERING JOHN LEWIS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, before I begin, I would like to take a moment to honor Congressman John Lewis, who died on Friday. A leader of the civil rights movement, he was one of the 13 original Freedom Riders and an organizer of the 1963 March on Washington. He was a man of conscience, conviction, and supreme courage.

''When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to do something,'' he would say.

John Lewis did something. Confronted by the great sin of segregation, John Lewis put himself front and center in the fight. He organized sit-ins. He led demonstrations. He marched for

freedom. And he paid for his convictions with his blood. A man who espoused nonviolence, he suffered incredible brutality at the hands of both police officers and civilian mobs. He was attacked and beaten an untold number of times.

During a march in Selma, AL—on a day that lives in infamy—a police officer fractured John Lewis's skull, leaving him with a scar that he carried to the end of his life. Yet John Lewis was unbowed. No matter how many times he was attacked or what he suffered, he got up again and rejoined the fight.

His death is a great loss, but John Lewis will live on in the annals of American heroes. May we all have his courage in fighting for the right.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, so far, Congress has provided $2.4 trillion to fight the coronavirus. Over the past couple of months here in the Senate, we have been closely tracking the implementation of this money and working with the administration on disbursement.

In June alone, we held 30 hearings in the Senate on COVID-related issues. All of this has helped us identify the priorities that need to shape our next bill, which we are hoping to pass in the next couple of weeks. Those priorities are kids, jobs, and healthcare.

First, kids: Getting kids back in school safely needs to be a priority. Being able to attend school in person is important for students' academic development and for their social and emotional well-being.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has stated: ''All policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school.''

Now, not every school may be able to fully reopen this fall, but we need to make sure that those schools that can reopen have the resources they need to reopen safely. That is why the legislation the Republicans are drafting here in the Senate would provide more than $100 billion to help schools ensure they have what they need to safely welcome students back to class.

While our first priority in getting kids back to school is ensuring their academic and social well-being, getting students back in school is also important for families' economic health. There are a lot of parents in this country who can't afford to have one parent stay home to homeschool. We need to ensure that those parents have access to schools and childcare wherever possible so that they can keep or return to their jobs.

Enabling Americans to return to work is key to our economic recovery. Currently, there are more than 17 million unemployed Americans. While this is a significant improvement from where we were 2 months ago, that number is still much too high, and we have to do everything we can to get these Americans back on the job and receiving a regular paycheck.

That is why the legislation we are drafting will provide incentives for businesses to hire and to retain workers. It will provide a refundable tax credit for Main Street businesses for the protective equipment and cleaning supplies that they need to keep their employees and customers safe and to encourage Americans to return to their businesses. It will provide another round of assistance to small businesses, with a focus on those that have been hit the hardest by the pandemic.

We also expect to issue another round of direct payments to hard-working Americans to help them get back on their feet and to stimulate the economy.

The third bucket of our coronavirus response is, of course, healthcare. We have to keep ensuring our healthcare professionals have the resources needed to treat patients, develop new treatments, and to find a vaccine to tame this virus once and for all.

The coronavirus legislation that we are drafting will address all three of those priorities.

Our legislation will also include another important priority that will protect jobs, schools, businesses, and healthcare workers, and that is liability protections. No matter how many precautions schools and businesses take, there is no way for them to completely eliminate all risk of employees, students, or customers contracting the virus, but an army of trial lawyers is waiting to levy lawsuits against even the most careful schools and businesses.

There is absolutely no question that schools and businesses should be liable for gross negligence or for intentional misconduct, but businesses and schools that are taking every reasonable precaution to protect employees and students and customers should not have to worry about facing lawsuits for virus transmission that they could not have prevented.

Healthcare workers giving their all on the frontlines to treat coronavirus patients should not have to worry that their efforts will be rewarded with lawsuits.

I would like to think that we can put a bipartisan bill together and get it to the President's desk in the next couple of weeks. Republicans are ready and willing to work with Democrats to get this done. We will introduce our draft shortly and be ready to negotiate with Democrats to arrive at a final bill, the same process that we followed with the CARES Act, our largest coronavirus relief bill to date.

This will work only if Democrats are willing to come to the table and negotiate a reasonable bill. My Democratic colleagues sometimes behave as if government money is drawn from a magical pot of gold that will never run out, but it is not. It is not.

Every dollar of the coronavirus funding we provided so far has been borrowed money, and every dollar we appropriate in the phase 4 bill we are drafting will likely be borrowed money as well.

It can be argued that it is money we need to borrow, but we need to remember that it is borrowed money and that the bill for that money will eventually come due. The more we drive up our debt, the greater the threat to the health of our economy, not to mention to the economic future of today's younger workers. We have an obligation to them to limit our borrowing to what is absolutely necessary to fight the virus.

The Democratic leader has come down to the floor the past couple of days and suggested that the Heroes Act—a $3 trillion coronavirus bill the House passed is—''a good product to start with'' when it comes to a phase 4 coronavirus relief bill.

That is ludicrous. The bill the Democratic leader is promoting—the bill he thinks is a good starting point for coronavirus legislation—is a bill that mentions cannabis—cannabis more often than it mentions the word ''jobs.''

Let me just repeat that. The bill the Democratic leader thinks is a good starting point for coronavirus relief legislation mentions the word ''cannabis'' more often than it mentions the word ''job.''

While the Democratic leader is certainly welcome to disagree with me, I don't think diversity studies in the cannabis industry have a major role to play in defeating this virus or getting Americans back to work, nor does federalizing election law—another priority the Democrats included in their bill.

Despite its $3 trillion pricetag, the bill the Democratic leader is endorsing fails to meet one of the most basic requirements of any coronavirus relief bill, and that is providing a meaningful plan for getting Americans back to work. It is disappointing to hear the Democratic leader promoting such an unserious piece of legislation at a time that we should be devoting all of our efforts to getting a bipartisan bill to the President.

I hope my other Democratic colleagues in the Senate are ready to look beyond partisan wish lists and focus on negotiating a relief package that addresses the real priorities we are facing: helping kids and parents, getting Americans back to work, and providing the healthcare resources needed to fight this virus.

Republicans are ready to come to the table, and I urge Democrats to join us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The Senator from Illinois.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4243

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I am expecting the Senator from Utah to come to the floor momentarily to resume debate over an issue which was raised yesterday and suspended to move to a vote that had been previously scheduled.

Since this item, this issue, we are discussing is of such importance to so many individuals in our country

today—and many of them are following this carefully and closely—I wanted to make sure we returned to it today to at least consider one aspect of the debate.

Yesterday, when I made a unanimous consent request, Senator LEE said he had not had time to look at my proposal. That is why I waited until today to come back, so that he would have that opportunity.

Yesterday, I came to the floor to speak about the plight of immigrant workers who are suffering because of a serious problem in our immigration system known as the green card backlog. Many of these immigrants are essential workers who are helping to lead the fight against COVID–19, but the green card backlog puts them and their families at risk of losing their immigration status and being subject to deportation.

Under the current law, there are clearly not enough immigrant visas—also known as green cards—available each year. The numbers that we have established in 1990 are still applicable today, though our national economy has doubled since then. We are still talking about 140,000 employment visas each year.

These so-called green cards have resulted in many people waiting for long periods of times—literally for years—for the opportunity to become legal permanent residents and securing one of the green cards. While they are waiting, their families are at risk.

These backlogs are particularly difficult on children because as they wait, the children, of course, advance in age, and when they reach age 21, they are subject to deportation. I have met with these families, and I have talked with them. It is a heartbreaking situation.

The unanimous consent request, which I will make today, addresses the plight of those children directly. Senator LEE objected to it yesterday. He said he had not had a chance to look at it. I hope he will reconsider when I make the same request today.

These children who face, what we call, aging out at age 21 would be protected by this unanimous consent request, which I am making. In addition to the green card backlog, it is clear there is a solution to this issue, which I am afraid we are not going to be able to achieve. It is to increase the number of green cards available each year in this country.

These immigrant workers who are seeking green cards are already in the United States working legally. This is not a question of increasing the number of green cards, of bringing in new immigrants to compete with American workers. These workers are already here. It is about whether immigrant workers will continue to be able to work on temporary visas, where they have to depend on their employer for their immigration status and their future is uncertain.

I introduced legislation known as the RELIEF Act. My cosponsors are Senator PATRICK LEAHY of Vermont and Senator MAZIE HIRONO of Hawaii. The RELIEF Act would increase the number of green cards to clear the backlog for all immigrants waiting in line for green cards within 5 years—eliminate the backlog for green cards within 5 years.

This RELIEF Act would keep immigrant families together by treating children and spouses of green card holders as immediate relatives, just as the children and spouses of citizens are, so they don't count against the green card caps. The RELIEF Act would protect the aging-out children who qualify for a green card based on parents' immigrant petition.

The RELIEF Act that I am describing is not novel or controversial; it is based on a provision of the 2013 comprehensive immigration reform bill, which I helped to write with the so-called Gang of 8. That included Senator McCain, Senator GRAHAM, Senator Flake, as well as Senator RUBIO on the Republican side; myself, Senator SCHUMER, Senator MENENDEZ, and Senator BENNET on the Democratic side. We worked hard and passed that measure through the Senate Judiciary Committee and on the floor by a vote of 68 to 32.

What I am proposing is something I have proposed in the past, crafted, passed, and offered to the House of Representatives to help start to solve the immigration crisis, which we currently have in this country. Unfortunately, the Republicans, who controlled the House of Representatives when this measure came before them several years ago, refused to even take up this measure and debate it.

If they had, we wouldn't be here today. The green card backlog would not exist based on the provision which I offered with others in the comprehensive immigration reform bill. Unfortunately, some of the Republicans on the other side of the aisle are still unwilling to increase any number of immigrant visas. They want to keep the immigrant workers on a temporary basis, where they and their family are at risk of losing their immigration status and being deported.

The senior Senator from Utah, Mr. LEE, has introduced S. 386, known as the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act, to address the green card backlog. I have a basic concern with that bill. It includes no additional green cards. Without any additional green cards, S. 386 will not reduce the green card backlog. Without additional green cards, S. 386 will not reduce the green card backlog.

Don't take it from me. There are those who will disagree and say: Oh, DURBIN is wrong. He is just mistaken in saying that.

Please go to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service. Here is what they said about S. 386, Senator LEE's legislation. ''S. 386 would not reduce future backlogs compared to current law.''

Despite my concerns about Senator LEE's bill, I agreed to sit down and work in good faith with him to resolve our differences. Last December, we reached an agreement—I believed we did—on an amendment to the bill. The amendment doesn't address the core problem because it doesn't increase the number of green cards. As a result, it would not reduce the green card backlog, but there was an improvement in the amendment which we put together. I talked about it yesterday.

Let me highlight two key provisions of our agreement. We protected the families who are stuck in this backlog waiting for a green card. Immigrant workers and immediate family members would be allowed to ''early file'' for their green cards. That was a proposal that came to me from Senator LEE, and I thought it was reasonable. These individuals would not receive their green cards early, but they would be able, while waiting, to switch jobs and travel without losing immigration status. I think that is reasonable. Early filing adds a critical protection that wasn't in S. 386.

Listen carefully. Our agreement prevents the children of immigrant workers from aging out of green card eligibility so they will not face deportation while they are waiting for a green card.

Our agreement also would crack down on the abuse of H–1B temporary work visas. Really, I think this is at the heart of the problems we are running into. There are corporate entities in India, which have extraordinary power over the securing of these H–1B visas.

The amendment we put together would allow legitimate use of H–1B visas, but here is what it would say. It would prohibit a company from hiring additional H–1B workers in the future if the company's workforce is more than 50 employees and more than 50 percent of those are temporary workers.

The 50–50 rule is from a bipartisan H–1B reform bill that I authored with Senator GRASSLEY. This provision was included in the 2013 comprehensive immigration reform bill.

Senator LEE has said publicly: This is a commonsense reform to root out abuse. I think he is right. I know these companies despise this provision, and I think it is one of the reasons we find ourselves with no common ground today. If this is included, they don't want anything to pass, and they are doing their best to stop it.

The reality is that the top recipients of H–1B visas today are outsourcing companies that use loopholes in the law to exploit immigrant workers and offshore American jobs. In the most recent year for which data is available, 8 of the top 10 recipients of new H–1B visas were outsourcing companies.

Unfortunately, yesterday, Senator LEE objected to this proposal, which we had put together. Instead, he offered a revised version that included changes that were requested by the Trump administration. Let me explain Senator LEE's changes because I think they are basic, and I believe they are a problem.

First, he wants to remove a provision from our original agreement, known as the hold harmless clause. What it says is very simple. It assures immigrants already waiting in line for green cards that there is nothing we will do that will, in any way, injure or delay their pursuit of a green card; they can't fall further behind in line. We hold them harmless from any change we make. Why wouldn't we? Some of these people have waited for years. The hold harmless provision basically says we are going to protect wherever you stand in line.

The second thing that Senator LEE wants to do is to delay for 3 years the effective date of the 50–50 rule to crack down on outsourcing companies. I don't know why we want to wait 3 years to do that. We don't have to. We shouldn't. Why on Earth would we give these companies that are outsourcing American jobs and exploiting immigrant workers a free pass for an additional 3 years?

Third, Senator LEE wanted to delay for years early filing for people who are stuck in the green card backlog. The object behind the early filing, and the reason why it is so appealing to me, was that it would protect the individuals applying as well as their families from the start, and now the Senator suggested that we delay this. That just means that many children will age out during that 1-to-3-year period of time and be subject to deportation. We shouldn't do that to these children and these families.

Yesterday, I made a simple proposal to Senator LEE, which he hadn't seen personally, and that is why we had to come back today. While we continue to debate the best way to fix the green card backlog, let's make sure no children of the affected families are harmed or deported. It is just that simple.

I offered a new bill—very simply stated—the Protect Children of Immigrants Workers Act. This brief, three-page bill would ensure that children do not age out while waiting for a green card.

Imagine if you brought your family to the United States, worked on an H–1B visa, applied for a green card to stay in this country, and your children are waiting with you for the green card. You are paying for them to go to college because they don't qualify as American citizens for any type of Federal financial aid. You are making great sacrifices for them. Then the day comes when they reach the age of 21 and they can be deported and the family divided. Why would we want to let that happen?

This three-page bill, the Protect Children of Immigrant Workers Act, protects those children. It would not increase the number of green cards. It would not provide any special benefits. It would simply allow children of immigrant workers to keep their place in line for a green card and be protected from deportation until they can get that card.

Yesterday, Senator LEE said he had not had a chance to review it, so I wanted to return to the floor today. I believe this is timely and important, and now he has had a chance to look at it. Senator LEE's original bill does not offer any protection for those children, which I think is a major humanitarian problem caused by the green card backlog.

The early-filing provision in my agreement with Senator LEE will immediately protect the kids in the backlog under the age of 21. However, if early-filing is delayed, Senator LEE now proposes those kids would age out and lose their green card eligibility.

I have met many of these young people. It breaks my heart to hear their stories, that they may be reaching a point where they have aged out and could be deported. That is why I want to offer this specific single provision. There is no reason these children should be punished for a broken immigration system. It is beyond their control, but it is not beyond our control to help them.

I now am going to ask unanimous consent for the Protect Children of Immigrant Workers Act.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged of S. 4243, the Protect Children of Immigrant Workers Act, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Reserving the right to object, for well over 8 months, my friend and distinguished colleague, the senior Senator from Illinois, has been publicly blocking legislation protecting the children of immigrant workers. Now there is something called the Protect Children of Immigrant Workers Act. He comes to the floor asking that we pass this bill by unanimous consent—a bill that, as he notes, was introduced just yesterday. Well, we must pass this right now, he says, because these children shouldn't have to suffer 1 more hour. With all due respect, they could have had relief months ago. They can still have relief today.

I have taken the time since yesterday to review Senator DURBIN's legislation, and I cannot support it. This legislation allows the children of H–1B workers to remain in the country for the 20 to 30 years that their parents have to wait in the green card backlog—the same green card backlog the Senator is now decrying.

When their parents die, children of immigrant workers will not be immediately deported. But this prolonging of dependent status is helpful only if the parent lives and works in this country until his or her green card application is actually adjudicated. It does nothing for the child of an immigrant whose dead parent's green card application is ultimately denied because his or her job is no longer available—nothing.

To be honest, the 20 to 30 years is a short wait for most of the Indian nationals currently stuck in this awful, hellish green card backlog. In fact, it is a drop in the bucket. In 2020, the wait for an EB2 green card is not, in fact, 20 to 30 years for an Indian national. What is it, then? Is it 30? Is it 40, 50, 60? No, it is much longer than that. It is 195 years. This means that someone from India entering the backlog today would have to wait 195 years to receive an EB3 green card. Even if we give their children this limbo status, none of them will have a prayer of becoming a U.S. citizen.

To put this in perspective, 195 years ago, John Quincy Adams had recently been inaugurated as President of the United States.

The legislation purports to allow aging-out children to move to a student visa status, but it also fails to accomplish even this. Student visas require the applicant to have residency in a foreign country, which, obviously, these children do not have.

Perhaps these are merely drafting errors, but as such, they underscore my concerns about passing slapdash legislation just because it bears a title that compels us to believe that it will correct the most egregious problems and protect the most vulnerable populations.

Even if we generously overlook these ''drafting errors,'' this legislation goes from sloppy to worse. Most egregiously, it will increase the existing green card backlog. If we pass this legislation on its own, high-skilled workers from highly populated countries will have fewer and fewer green cards available to them, meaning they will have to wait longer and longer for relief. In fact, by the time we stretch this out to 2030, the 195-year backlog I mentioned a moment ago would be extended out to a 400- to 450-year backlog. That is not fair. I can't imagine that is what the Senator from Illinois wants.

If we want to actually protect the children of immigrant workers, we need to end the inequities of the green card system. Real protection for the children is impossible unless we have a fair path forward for the parents.

I have worked for 9 years on a thoughtful solution to these problems in the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act. This compromise protects children, protects widows and widowers, and it provides an equitable path forward for all our high-skilled immigrants. That is why I call on Senator DURBIN to lift his hold on the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act and to provide relief to immigrant children and to their parents.

As to the suggestion that the changes made to this legislation were bad, that they were a departure from what we

agreed on, it is not true. The implementation delay simply allows the USCIS a time to develop the adequate infrastructure to implement what we had proposed, the 50–50 rule change. This 3 years is there to protect the H–1B visa holders who were already here. The hold-harmless provision was taken care of with the 3- to 9-year transition that now covers them.

In any event, this legislation—the one Senator DURBIN now tries to pass by unanimous consent, introduced for the first time yesterday that I have now reviewed—is sloppy. It doesn't solve the problem, and it would make a lot of things worse. I therefore object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, there is no question that there is a green card backlog for immigrant visas. We issue 140,000 employment-based visas a year and 226,000 family visas. There are some 5 million seeking them. I want to increase the number of green cards. The Senator from Utah opposes that. As a result, the bill that he introduced, according to analysis by the Congressional Research Service—this is not DURBIN's language; this is the Congressional Research Service: S. 386, the lead legislation, would not reduce future backlogs compared to current law.

When he talks about 195 years and John Quincy Adams or whatever his historical analogy was, he doesn't address that at all in S. 386.

The problem, of course, is that he is bound to a position of his party that will not allow one additional new immigrant—none. I don't take that position. These men and women and their kids have been living in the United States. Many of them have been here for years, some of them for decades. Some of them are doctors in hospitals in my hometown. I trust them, and I trust their kids. What I am asking him to do today is simply join with me in protecting their children while we resolve the other issues. He refuses. He refused yesterday. He refuses again today.

He calls my approach sloppy. Let's see the Lee alternative to protect the children. I would like to see what he would like to propose. Maybe it is language that is better, and maybe I can embrace it. But let's take care of that discrete part of this issue. Why would we leave these children now aging into adults at risk? That is just the wrong way to approach this. We can solve this problem, and we should. While we solve it, we should protect these children. It is within the ken of both Senator LEE and myself to sit down through staff and come up with that language. I believe we can.

I want to say I will continue to offer this opportunity for Senator LEE to protect these children until we can sit down in good faith and resolve any differences we have between us. I have heard this case over and over again about the plight of these children. I am trying to address it. He continues to object.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, we have the opportunity right here to pass this right now. This bill fixes this problem.

As to the suggestion that we can't do any of this without increasing the total number of green cards—this is a poison pill. My friend and colleague knows that it is a poison pill. In fact, we had that very discussion. I don't ordinarily—in fact, I have a uniform policy against publicly talking about private conversations we have as colleagues. We have now brought it to the floor.

We talked about this. This was the basis upon which we reached a deal in his office in December. The point there was to understand that we can't pass something—certainly by unanimous consent—that increases the total number of employment-based green cards. It is not going to happen. So we are dealing here with that finite universe. That is the basis of the deal we reached in December.

As to the suggestion that we can't do anything without increasing the total number of green cards, the Senator knows that is not on the table. That is not fair. What we want to do is make this process fair, even if we only have a limited number of green cards to work with, which is the case. Whether you like that political reality or not, it is the political reality. It is the factual understanding that the Senator and I discussed and understood in December when we made that deal. The Lee alternative is the encapsulation of that.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 1044 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the Lee amendment at the desk be agreed to, the bill, as amended, 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. DURBIN. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Just do the math; 140,000 EB visas and 226,000 family visas per year and 5 million people waiting. If you think you can solve this without changing the number of green cards, you can't. You may address it from one angle or another. You may help some who are waiting as opposed to others. You only give assistance to some at the expense of some other group.

I understand the Senator's position. I don't quarrel with the fact he made it clear from the start that, from his perspective and perhaps from his side of the aisle, there is just no appetite for increasing the number of green cards, even for these people who have been living and working here in the United States for years and sometimes decades, even for physicians from India and other countries who are literally risking their lives today on COVID–19 patients. The Senator told me there is no appetite for giving them additional green cards so they can stay here on a permanent basis. I think that is unfair, and that is my position.

The Senator made it clear—and I am not saying otherwise—that he disagrees with me. So what I tried to do is come in and say that at least during the pendency, while they are waiting for green cards—which could be decades unless the law is changed—let's at least protect their families. That is all I basically said.

He has come back and said: I want to put in a provision that takes out the hold-harmless protection. I want to protect these people who are outsourcing companies in India that have captured the lion's share of these H–1B visas. I want to make sure that those who are going to be protected have to wait up to 3 years before there is any protection.

Why in the world would we do any of those things? I am willing to sit down and talk to you, but I am not going to accept these at this point unless we can find a starting point, which is protection for the children of these families. If you will agree to that, I will be more than happy to discuss the other provisions again, but because the other provisions are now what you are offering, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, the protection for the children is now found in the proposal, in the amendment at the desk—the one that was just objected to by my friend and colleague, the Senator from Illinois.

I would ask my colleague rhetorically or directly, as he may choose: If, in fact, he is unwilling and remains unwilling to negotiate on any bill addressing this problem without increasing the total number of employment-based green cards, why in the world did he waste months of my time? Why did he lead me to believe, while in his office, that he was open to such an agreement that was, in fact, the premise upon which we proceeded? We spent months on that, and I worked in good faith.

As I mentioned yesterday, it was against my better judgment that I agreed to announce with the Senator on the Senate floor that we had reached an agreement because I knew that we had to work out a few kinks, but I proceeded based solely on the feasibility and our ability to implement that bill. That was the only change that we made.

Now, if the Senator wants to make some adjustment to that, bring it forward. I would love to consider it. Yet what he is now telling me is that the premise upon which we proceeded on those negotiations and then spent

weeks and months working on was false in that the whole premise that we could reach some sort of compromise—an actual compromise—that wouldn't increase the number of total green cards available was illusory. I find that disappointing.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, the Senator has addressed a question to me, I believe.

Mr. LEE. Rhetorically or otherwise, the Senator is welcome to answer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I know other Senators are waiting to speak, so I will try to be as concise and brief as possible.

I understand the Senator's position. He doesn't want another green card. He believes Members on his side of the aisle don't want an increase in the number of green cards—period. I knew that going in. He made that abundantly clear. We can't solve the underlying problem without it, but we can make it better. That is why we continue to talk and negotiate, and I hope we will continue to talk and negotiate. Yet, for goodness' sake, the starting point ought to be the protection of these children.

Can we not agree that we will protect the children and then proceed to continue the negotiations on the premise that the Senator cannot accept one more green card? I can, and the Senator can't, but we will try to improve the system with that premise accepted. At the starting point, for goodness' sake, let's protect the children while we negotiate and debate. Hopefully, we can do it on a timely basis. That is my response.

I am willing to continue to work. I understand the Senator cannot issue another green card. The math never works with 5 million people waiting and 140,000 employment green cards and 226,000 family visas a year. It is never going to work, but I am willing to try to make the system better, with the understanding that I will increase the number of green cards and that the Senator will not.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, I am always happy to discuss any counterproposal. If the Senator would make one, I would love to see it. It is not fair to say I don't care about those kids because I am unwilling to create additional green cards. If the Senator wants to protect these children, pass this bill. Pass it today. Pass it at this very moment.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4019

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, I rise to speak in support of S. 4019, the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act—legislation that I have introduced along with Senator CORNYN. We have 54 cosponsors and broad bipartisan support that would make Juneteenth a Federal holiday. In a few minutes, I will ask unanimous consent that the Senate take up and pass this important bill.

Our country is in the midst of a long overdue reckoning on race and justice. The murder of George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis Police Department has galvanized the Nation as protesters have taken to our streets, demanding justice—justice for George Floyd, justice for Breonna Taylor, and justice for countless other Black and Brown Americans who have been hurt or killed at the hands of law enforcement. Yet this reckoning goes well beyond seeking accountability for police officers who betray the trust we bestow upon them.

The disparate treatment and mistreatment of Black and Brown Americans permeates our society. It infects our courts, our schools, and our places of work. It reflects the unfulfilled promise of a nation built upon the notion that all are created equal, and it has its roots in our Nation's original sin—slavery—a crime against humanity that we have for far too long failed to acknowledge, address, or come to grips with.

One way to further the process of racial reconciliation and healing is to recognize, honor, and celebrate the formal end of slavery in the United States and to do so at the Federal level. Perhaps the most effective, direct, and far-reaching way to do that is with a Federal holiday commemorating that historic event.

For more than 150 years, the Juneteenth holiday, which marks the emancipation of slaves, has been observed one way or the other across our Nation, including in Texas, but it is long past time to place Juneteenth on par with other Federal holidays so that all Americans in all 50 States will celebrate Juneteenth alongside Veterans Day, Memorial Day, Martin Luther King Day, and other Federal holidays.

The celebration of Juneteenth dates back to June 19, 1865, when Union soldiers, led by MG Gordon Granger, traveled to Galveston, TX, with the announcement that the Civil War had ended and that the enslaved were now free. This was 2½ years after the date of President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, but either the news of Lincoln's order had not reached many, including those in Texas, or local officials had refused to enforce it.

On June 19, 1865, Major General Granger read to the people of Texas General Order No. 3, the first lines of which told them clearly and unequivocally: ''The people of Texas are informed that, in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free.''

Juneteenth celebrations followed as did the recognition of Juneteenth as the formal end of slavery in the United States. Since 1865, communities all across the Nation have celebrated Juneteenth with parades, cookouts, prayer gatherings, historical and cultural readings, musical performances, and many other celebrations. These events have provided many with the opportunity for reflection, education, and a deeper understanding of our history as a nation—the whole history—and how it has affected and shaped the lives of Black Americans.

Nearly every State and the District of Columbia have passed legislation recognizing Juneteenth as a holiday or observance, and the Senate has passed a resolution designating June 19 as Juneteenth Independence Day, but Juneteenth has never received the higher status it deserves as a Federal holiday. The Juneteenth National Independence Day Act rights this wrong and makes Juneteenth a Federal holiday.

We still must travel a long and difficult road to justice and equality in the United States, but we cannot get there without recognizing the original sin of slavery and marking its end. It is incumbent upon all Americans to truthfully acknowledge and understand our past and how it affects our present and our future. Making Juneteenth a Federal holiday will not right all of the wrongs of the past or fix what remains broken, but it is an important step. It is the truth of our history and the missing half of the story of our Nation's freedom and independence. It is long past time to recognize Juneteenth as a Federal holiday.

Let me stop there and recognize my partner in this effort, the senior Senator from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I will be brief.

Let me just tell the Senator from Massachusetts that I agree with everything he has said. It shows how people of, maybe, different political ideologies—certainly different parties—can come together and recognize that there is a moment available to us here in which we can demonstrate our nonpartisan support for this act of racial reconciliation in our country.

I agree that slavery was the original sin. Our founding documents said that all men and women were created equal, but that certainly wasn't the practice when it came to African Americans at the time who were officially designated as something less than fully human. It was an outrageous act at the time, and our country has paid a dear price for that over the years—from the Civil War to the violence that led up to the peaceful civil rights movement in the sixties. It is obvious from the recent events—George Floyd's death in particular—that we are not where we need to be. We still have room to grow as part of our developing that more perfect Union.

I know our friend and colleague TIM SCOTT, who has been at the forefront of this discussion with his advocacy for the Justice Act, has a lot of bipartisan ideas for police reform. He points out that, as an African American, his experience has been much different from

those who are non-African Americans. He said, over the last two decades, he has been stopped—as he puts it, ''driving while Black''—about 18 different times.

At a roundtable that was sponsored by Mayor Sylvester Turner and that I had requested, I sat next to a pastor of a church in Houston who happened to be the local head of the NAACP.

He said: I honor the police. I respect the police. I support the police. Yet he said: My son is afraid of the police, and we have to do everything we can to cure that trust deficit.

In Texas, we have recognized Juneteenth as a State holiday for 40 years, obviously, because of the fact that this occurred as a result of the Emancipation Proclamation's being announced in Galveston, TX. Yet I recently cosponsored a bill with Congresswoman SHEILA JACKSON LEE to study a trail, basically, from Galveston to Houston as the possible designation of a national park in further recognition of this event.

I believe strongly that we need to remember our history because if we don't remember our history, in the words of one sage, ''we will be condemned to relive it.'' We have come so far, but we know we still have further to go. I do believe that the appropriate word to use is ''reconciliation.'' This is an opportunity for us to demonstrate our concern and our commitment to equal justice and equal treatment under the law by recognizing Juneteenth as a Federal holiday.

Mr. MARKEY. I thank the Senator from Texas. This is a thoroughly bipartisan effort, and it is long overdue.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration and that the Senate now proceed to S. 4019; further, 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?

The Senator from Wisconsin.

Mr. JOHNSON. Madam President, in reserving the right to object, let me start out by saying that I agree with virtually everything my colleagues from both Massachusetts and Texas have said about celebrating the emancipation of the slaves. That was an important moment in U.S. history. It should be observed, and it should be celebrated. I have no disagreement whatsoever with that at all. The one area of disagreement is how the bill's sponsors have chosen to celebrate that holiday.

As the Senator from Massachusetts pointed out, since 1865, it has been observed with celebrations and cookouts, which is the appropriate way of doing this. I object to the fact that, by naming it a national holiday—and what they are leaving out of their argument and its main impact—it will give Federal workers a paid day off that the rest of America will have to pay for.

When I asked for a CBO score, the sponsors of the bill had not even obtained a score, and I still don't think they have obtained a score. The estimate, in terms of what it will cost American taxpayers in the private sector to pay for a paid holiday for Federal workers, is about $600 million per year. The CBO score would come in at $6 billion over 10.

In terms of why I object, let me just put a couple of facts to that $600 million bill that hard-working taxpayers would have to foot in an era when we are $26.5 trillion in debt and when 17 million of our fellow Americans are currently unemployed.

The first chart here—let's just talk about how many days off Federal workers get currently.

I have two columns—minimum and maximum. For paid holidays, they get 10, which is pretty generous. Most people in the private sector get something similar—7, 8, 9, or 10. For paid leave days, there is a minimum of 13, up to 26; for paid sick days, 13, minimum and maximum.

What we just added in last year's NDAA was paid parental leave, which allows an individual—either mother or father, with either a natural childbirth or an adoption—60 days of paid leave.

So for a total, at a minimum, there are 96 days, up to 109 days if they take paid parental leave.

Looked at a different way, as a ratio, if they take the maximum number of 109 days, that is, basically, for every 1.4 days you work, you get a day off. On a minimum basis with paid parental leave, for every 1.7 days you work, you get a day off.

Now, again, I realize the paid parental leave is a ''just a few times in somebody's career'' phenomenon, so let's take a look at this without paid parental leave, and it will show that the number of days with pay that Federal workers get off is still quite generous.

Again, paid holidays, they get 10; paid leave, 13, up to 26; paid sick leave, 13, for a total of 36 to 49.

So, again, going back to that ratio, the maximum number of days without paid parental leave, a Federal worker can work 4.3 days and then get a day off—basically a 4-day workweek for the entire year. That is quite generous.

So what I am objecting to is creating a national holiday that gives Federal workers another day off with pay, paid for by the American taxpayer, and we are collectively already $26.5 trillion in debt.

Last slide. I would like to just, in general, talk about the private sector pay versus Federal worker pay. I know there are some disputes about this in terms of education and that type of thing, but still, this is pretty solid information.

The 2018 average annual wage—just wages, salary or wages—for Federal workers is over $94,000. For private sector workers, the average is about $63,000 or about 67 percent of what a Federal worker makes.

When you add in benefits, total compensation, the average total compensation for Federal workers in 2018 was $136,000, just shy of $136,000. In the private sector, the total cost of compensation is a little more than $75,000—55 percent of what Federal Government workers make.

So if you strip out and just compare the benefits, again, we are talking about an extra paid day off, an extra paid holiday for only Federal workers to celebrate Juneteenth, paid for by American workers who make about $12,000, on average per benefit, compared to $41,000 in benefits for Federal workers. That is only 29 percent.

So those are the facts. Again, that is what I object to.

Again, I am happy to celebrate Juneteenth. I think we should celebrate the fact that we did remove that original sin by emancipating the slaves. That is a day of celebration. I agree with that. I simply don't believe we should make American taxpayers in the private sector pony up $600 million a year, $6 billion over 10 years, to give Federal workers, who already are paid quite generously and have quite a few days off one more paid day off.

So what I am proposing—again, I don't object to Juneteenth and a celebration, but if we are going to make that a Federal holiday, the main impact of that is giving Federal workers a paid day off. I would just suggest this: Why don't we take away one of their days of paid leave?

So I have an amendment at the desk, and I would ask that the Senator from Massachusetts modify his request to include my amendment at the desk; that the amendment be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Does the Senator so modify his request?

Mr. MARKEY. Madam President, reserving the right to object, the Senator's proposal—rather than allowing this unanimous consent request to go through, the Senator proposes to hold it hostage to taking away the leave benefits that come with paid holidays for American workers. That is something we have never done before, and with good reason. We shouldn't be penalizing our workers by taking away benefits, especially not in the current environment and especially not as the price to pay for recognizing a long overdue Federal holiday.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. JOHNSON. Madam President, reserving the right to object, and to quickly respond to the Senator from Massachusetts, I am not taking anything away from Federal workers. I am just not willing to give them an extra day paid.

So if we create Juneteenth as a Federal paid holiday, they will get an extra day, and I am just saying let's keep them whole by removing a paid leave day, and then they will have the exact same number of days off as they have currently, and the American taxpayer will not be out an extra $600 million per year or $6 billion over 10 years.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, before I speak, several of my colleagues on this side of the aisle, over the next several minutes—well, probably for more than a half hour—will be coming to the floor to discuss what I am discussing, which is a very important problem we have of rapidly increasing drug prices.

After I speak, these other Senators will come to the floor: Senator BRAUN, Senator CASSIDY, Senator COLLINS, Senator HYDE-SMITH, Senator MCSALLY. All of these people have been very favorable in support of the Prescription Drug Reduction Act, and I want to thank them for participating in bringing attention to this very important issue of unjustified increases in drug prices.

After these folks I just mentioned speak, I understand that my colleague from Iowa, who is in support of the legislation, is going to come at a later time today.

So thank you to my colleagues.

According to a recent Gallup poll, 9 out of 10 Americans are concerned about prescription drug prices. Specifically, they are concerned that the pharmaceutical industry will take advantage of the current pandemic to increase drug prices. That poll was published a month ago. Unfortunately, those concerns have become a reality now.

Two weeks ago, POLITICO reported that pharmaceutical companies have raised prices on hundreds of prescription drugs just during the pandemic. The report says that there have been more than 800—800—price increases just this year.

I have been working on a bill for over a year and a half to stem these increases and rein in drug prices. It would cap costs for Medicare recipients, cap increases to the rate of inflation, and save taxpayers nearly $100 billion. It wasn't simple, but I am glad to have produced this kind of bill with Ranking Member WYDEN and my colleagues here with me today.

But I am disappointed. My partner and all of my Democratic colleagues who approved this bill in committee by a vote of 19 to 9 declined to cosponsor an improved version of the bill that they helped put together in the first place, and this is the work of about 18 months.

I can't be sure why, but I have to assume it is because it is an election year, and, somehow, passing a bill that would do so much good in a time with so much hardship might help Republicans who also support the bill, hurting Democrats' chances of taking the majority.

As we consider a new relief bill, we ought to put aside that kind of politics-before-people method of legislating. We need to approve the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act as part of this package. Our country is facing the most serious public health crisis in a generation—not just a generation, if you think back—in generations.

Millions of Americans are newly unemployed, and many small businesses have slowed or shuttered altogether. People across the country are stretching their paychecks and their savings to get through this virus pandemic.

In the CARES Act, passed in March, and in subsequent legislation, we helped slow the hurt caused by this virus. But there is only so much a stimulus check or tax relief can do when your bills just keep coming and going up—meaning the pharmaceutical bills.

These drug price increases are a weight that Americans shouldn't have to bear, especially seniors on whom the virus is taking a particular toll.

The increases aren't a result of a functioning marketplace or an industry with healthy competition. Addressing these price increases is also something we all largely agree on.

In 2016, the President campaigned on making the marketplace for prescription drugs fairer and more affordable for patients. He won. He even talked about that promise in a State of the Union message when he said that he wants Congress to send a bill for him to sign this year.

So the President made that campaign promise in 2016, and the President has done many things since then to carry out that campaign promise. He has even helped me in the development of this legislation.

That was 2016. This is 2020. In 2018, we have had many House Democrats campaign on making the marketplace for prescription drugs fairer and more affordable. Many of them won, and they took over the House of Representatives. It is time to put politics aside and finally act.

Just because Big Pharma was bankrupting patients before the pandemic doesn't mean that we should allow them to keep on doing it now. In fact, there is no better time to put an end to Big Pharma's price gouging than right now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. BRAUN. Madam President, Senator GRASSLEY and I share a passion that I think most Americans do in that it is time that we end this stranglehold that the healthcare industry has on all of us because they pose as free enterprisers, but there is nothing free about the way they actually operate.

''Free enterprise'' means you embrace competition. You are not putting up barriers to entry. You engage the consumer so that they can see what you are charging them. That does not occur. The alternative will be as clear on the other side of the aisle; they want to make government the business partner of healthcare. If the industry doesn't get with it and start doing what all the rest of us do when we go to the marketplace—embrace competition, be willing to compete, don't ask for barriers to entry, and, yes, we tell the customer what we charge them before they buy it. That doesn't happen in healthcare.

The market is opaque and complex. There is nothing free about it, except that drugmakers are free to charge whatever they want. The market is dependent on government-sanctioned rebates and monopolies by the FDA exclusivities and patent abuse. It is time to fix this. PBM may not mean much to the public, but it stands for pharmacy benefit managers. This is a structure of middleman that is not present in other industries. Normally, with transparency, prices cascade down through the system in a way that everybody can see it, and the successful survivors in that industry have performed because they give good value to their customers; they keep their overhead low; and they earn the business.

PBMs use techniques like spread pricing. Normally, there is a spread—you buy it for this and sell it for that—but not where people can't see it. It is time that we get away from this complexity and the opaqueness of it because the day of reckoning will come, and the day of reckoning is not too far away.

I recently came from the business world. No one likes the healthcare industry other than the CEOs and owners of these businesses. All of us who have to deal with them are just asking for that one simple thing: Show us what things cost. Quit hiding it. Insurance companies have these secret deals with hospitals, with pharma, and it is starting to cost too much. It shows up in the fact that it is nearly 20 percent of our GDP in the United States, and it costs almost half of that in most other developed countries. The sad thing is, the results aren't any better. In many cases, the results are better at a price that is half the cost.

Both Chairman GRASSLEY and I have talked with President Trump. President Trump has been the most vocal individual in DC about trying to get the industry to work like the rest of us entrepreneurs do. Every time he has an Executive order, they take him to court. That is ending because just recently the hospitals tried that, and the district court overturned it. They will probably appeal it, and, hopefully, the appellate court will overturn it.

I have a transparency bill which is as simple as: Show us what you are charging us before we engage your service.

Mr. GRASSLEY has the same thing basically on drug pricing. Let me tell you how that works.

This is a real live experiment that I put into place 12 years ago. I was so sick and tired of the insurance agents coming in and telling me how lucky I was that it was only going up 5 to 10 percent this year. I didn't think I was very lucky. My company wasn't large enough to spend a lot of time on it. When we got to be 300 employees, that starts to add up. Now we have 1,000 employees. Thank goodness my kids have to deal with that with a good, young executive team, but I put something in place 12 years ago that I am proud of.

I said enough was enough. What do we have that is really going to change the dynamic? You have to remember, this is 12 years ago—talk about trying to find transparency then. We were lucky that we were large enough to self-insure. By doing that, we probably saved close to 25 percent, and by engaging our employees in their own well-being and incentivizing them to shop around to enable their ability to find better prices, it was even there if you looked for it hard back then. Long story short, we have not had a premium increase at my company in 12 years. I am proud of that. We covered preexisting conditions with no caps on coverage because we took a radical change to how healthcare should be bought by the consumer, the employer, and forced the transparency out of a system that wasn't giving much of it then.

Now there is more transparency, but it is just on the fringes. If you get that to happen, prices will cascade down through the system. President Trump had another Executive order for pharma—all these expensive drugs you see advertised—to put the price along with the advertisement. A lot of times it is deceptive—you can get it for as little as $5 a month. Well, somebody is paying for that $60,000 or $70,000 drug. Generally, it is the employer, and the employee some of it, but it is, again, due to the fact that we can't see anything.

Americans are blindfolded from prices, only to receive medical bills, often, that arrive 2 months later. They have no idea, and they open up the envelope with trepidation. Oh my goodness. It wasn't what I thought it would be. More often than not, it is: Oh, my gosh. This is terrible. It has got to end.

It would be different if we were asking for something that is radical. What we are asking for is tell us what you are charging us before we have to engage your services.

That is why it is so important. The White House is behind it. Hopefully, the other side of the aisle will get behind it. Support Chairman GRASSLEY's bill, the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act, and support my bill, the Healthcare Price Transparency Act. The story I told you about my own company would happen across the country, and we wouldn't be complaining about these surprise billings. We wouldn't be holding our breath. We would simply be doing what all educated consumers do when they go to buy from a truly free enterprise.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, COVID–19 is a continuing threat to Americans' physical and financial health, and it is at this intersection that Congress can make a meaningful impact on the family budgets of all Americans by passing sensible legislation to lower the cost of prescription drugs through measures such as the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act or, as I like to call it, the ''Making Coronavirus Medications Affordable Act.''

There is an urgent need to lower the cost of prescription drugs. The high price of drugs is not a new problem, but it is a problem that is going to be made worse by the coronavirus pandemic. Millions of households have seen their incomes suffer due to economic lockdowns aimed at containing the virus.

It is encouraging that job numbers continue to outpace expectations, but still, millions of fellow Americans are out of work, which affects their pocketbook and potentially their insurance coverage. Americans do not need the added burden of expensive drugs, particularly right now.

Congress is providing relief for American families and businesses through the COVID–19 crisis, and we are considering another round of support. I think we should include how do we make drugs more affordable. That way, if folks become ill, they know that they will be able to afford the cure. I believe the best path forward is the ''Making Coronavirus Drugs Affordable Act,'' as I call it, or, as Chairman GRASSLEY calls it, the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act. I like mine better.

Now, the difficulty in addressing the issue of the price of medications is that a balance must be struck between making sure the medication is affordable but also making sure there is still a profit motive that will incentivize the researchers and pharmaceutical companies to find these cures that we know we need. Just think about it. Without innovation, we would not be able to find a vaccine for coronavirus—a vaccine that will save millions of lives worldwide and allow us to go back to a normal life.

Let me just praise the pharmaceutical industry. We have seen them respond to this crisis in many helpful ways. Additionally, they recently committed a billion dollars to antimicrobial resistance, which is to say, to find an antibiotic that will work when other antibiotics no longer do. They have invested in large-scale and rapid treatment options, and, again, it is only through innovation that we will beat this virus and end the pandemic.

But we must remember this: If a patient cannot afford the innovation, the new medicine, it is as if the innovation never occurred. The ''Making Coronavirus Drugs Affordable Act'' strikes the balance between lowering costs for families and incentivizing companies to find those cures.

Let me show you what this bill does. It caps the patient's out-of-pocket expenses. It lets patients pay over time. It protects patients from price gouging, and it preserves the incentive for companies to find cures. Let me explain each of these.

First, the bill caps the out-of-pocket expense for those in the Medicare Part D Program, our senior citizens, and particularly for the most vulnerable seniors with chronic conditions. Research has shown that seniors are at the most risk for severe complications and death from COVID–19. When a treatment or cure is widely available, cost should never be a barrier for a senior to access the drug that she or he needs to survive.

Under the current system, this is what a senior citizen pays for their medicinal benefit under Medicare Part D. They have a deductible for which the senior pays 100 percent; the initial coverage phase and the coverage gap phase, for which they pay one-fourth of the expense; and then in the catastrophic phase, the patient pays 5 percent of the cost no matter how high that expense goes.

So let's imagine a medication which costs over $1 million. They are paying 5 percent of that medication cost, and if I could stand up any higher—but I keep losing my microphone—they will pay 5 percent of that. Think about a theoretical drug that costs $3 million a year. The senior would be required to pay 5 percent of whatever that drug costs. That is under current law. What we are trying to do is fix this. If this occurs, the senior will not be able to afford lifesaving medications.

Under the legislation that we are attempting to pass, it would change the Medicare Part D standard benefit so that there is still the initial deductible in which the senior pays 100 percent, but after paying 20 percent of the initial coverage phase, there is no longer that 5 percent toward infinity. We make medications affordable for the senior. If that is all the bill did, we would do something quite remarkable for the ability of a patient to be able to afford a potentially lifesaving drug.

By the way, as a physician, I know this is a barrier for patients to be able to have their drugs. So we address that in this bill.

The second thing we do—you might say: Wait a second. The senior citizen if he or she has to pay for all this for a very expensive drug in the month of January, they can't afford that. Under the current situation, the senior has to pay her deductible and her initial coverage phase whenever it is due, which might be in the first week of the year. What we also do in this bill is we give the senior citizen the opportunity to pay all this lump sum as a series of

payments over 12 months. So let's imagine that this was $10,000. Instead of having to pay all of it in January, she could pay $800 every month over the course of the year. That allows her to budget and to factor it in with the other sources of income that she has. Not only do we cap the senior citizen's out-of-pocket expense, but we also allow her to pay that expense over a set of months so she can factor it into her budget. That is the second great thing that this bill does.

What is another thing that we do? Senator BRAUN also referred to this, but we also have cost transparency. If there is a medication which has the price being elevated unnecessarily, and if the customer knew that, she would know: Wait a second. I can get my medications far less expensively here versus there or, if I accept a substitute, again, the medication will be more affordable. We mandate that kind of price transparency that allows the customer to make an informed decision.

Now, I know there are competing ideas on how to lower drug costs. House Democrats, for example, have introduced legislation that they claim would lower costs. But, remember, I told you that there is this tension. How do we preserve the incentive to innovate while still making sure the innovation is affordable?

House Democrats have put up a bill. Yes, it makes medicine more affordable, but it kills the desire to innovate. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that if the bill the House Democrats have proposed is passed, there will be 38 fewer cures invented by pharmaceutical manufacturers—38 fewer cures.

Let me tell you a story. I mentioned that I am a physician. I came of age in my residency, if you will, when the AIDS epidemic hit. I was 25 years old or 27 years old, and I would see men my age dying of HIV. We didn't have an antibody then. If you were diagnosed with HIV—again, we called it AIDS then—you basically were dead because we had no cures. Since then, we now have medications that—if you are infected with HIV, you can live until you are 75 years old or 80 years old. We have found something that doesn't quite cure, but it allows it to be treated as a chronic condition. What if we didn't have that cure? What if that were one of the 38 cures we never had?

What if one of the cures we lose out on is a cure for Alzheimer's? My parents died of Alzheimer's. All of us know somebody affected by Alzheimer's or dementia. What if the cure we lose is the cure for Alzheimer's?

You may think you are making medications less expensive, but in terms of human life, you are making it that much more expensive because instead of finding that cure for Alzheimer's, you instead have consigned those people with Alzheimer's to a slow, awful death—awful for them and awful for their loved ones as they see their parents decline. I would argue that it is fool's gold to say that the House Democratic bill saves money. It just shifts it, and it shifts it to the misery of the family who will never enjoy one of these cures that are not otherwise developed.

To fix the problem of the high cost of drugs, it will take a bipartisan coalition. We have that with this bill. It ends government handouts to pharmaceutical companies, but it doesn't price-fix. It saves $80 billion for the taxpayer and for the patient, and it maintains incentives for lifesaving innovations.

Some in this Chamber will be tempted to stop this bill until after this year's election. To them, I would say: Don't let politics keep us from delivering drug-pricing relief for American families. Too much is on the line, especially during this pandemic. To do nothing while families try to pay medical bills is wrong. Let's work together to pass this bill to lower the cost of drugs, to protect innovation, and to save lives.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, first, let me recognize and thank Senator GRASSLEY for his extraordinary leadership on an issue that matters so greatly to the American people, and that is the high cost of prescription drugs. His persistence has produced the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act, a far-reaching set of bold proposals that I strongly endorse and that build on the work I have done as the chairman of the Senate Aging Committee.

More than half of all Americans and 90 percent of our seniors take at least one prescription drug each month. We should be able to work together to help the American people—particularly our seniors—on an issue that affects their health and their finances. No senior should be faced with the choice of buying food they need, paying a bill for the oil to heat their home, or buying their prescription drug.

I remember very well being in line at the pharmacy in Bangor, ME, and the couple in front of me found out that their copay was $113. The husband looked at his wife and he said: Honey, we just can't afford that. They left the prescription that one of them needed that was prescribed by their doctor there on the pharmacy counter. When I asked the pharmacist how often this happens, he said: Each and every day. Every day.

That is why we should be working together to pass Senator GRASSLEY's bill, as well as many of the other bipartisan bills that you have heard described today, including legislation that I have advocated to improve the lives of millions of Americans. This goal surely should be beyond partisan politics.

In just the last year, three Senate committees advanced legislation to reform our flawed drug-pricing system. I can't think of anything else that we buy where the price is less transparent and is more opaque than prescription drugs.

The Finance Committee's bill, the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act, which I am proud to cosponsor, would make crucial improvements. As Senator CASSIDY just ably explained, one of the most important improvements is to Medicare Part D. It would protect our seniors with an out-of-pocket spending limit. It would also include cost-control measures, such as an inflationary cap to limit price hikes. We have made some progress in this area.

I have authored legislation that is making a difference for patients. One of the laws I authored bans gag clauses that had prohibited pharmacists from informing their customers if there were a less expensive way to purchase their prescription drug. Amazingly enough, sometimes it is cheaper to pay out-of-pocket than to use your insurance card—not something that most consumers would ever realize unless the pharmacist informed him or her.

My bill also updates a 2003 law requiring drug manufacturers to notify the Federal Trade Commission of patent settlement agreements, giving the agency greater visibility into whether they include tactics such as anti-competitive reverse payments that slow or defeat the introduction of lower cost drugs. Another law I authored is helping to bring lower cost generics to the marketplace more quickly by expediting their approval by the FDA.

But clearly there is more that we must do. At a time when economic and health security are more linked than ever, Congress has an opportunity to deliver a decisive victory in lowering costs for patients.

In addition to the Finance Committee package, the HELP Committee bill—I serve on the HELP Committee, which is chaired by Senator ALEXANDER—incorporated more than 14 bipartisan measures to increase price competition, including portions of a bill that I introduced with Senator TIM KAINE, the Biologic Patent Transparency Act, which is intended to prevent drug manufacturers from gaming the patent system.

Patents are important to encourage the development of earth-breaking, groundbreaking new pharmaceuticals, but the system should not be gamed so that when the patent is about to expire, a host of new patents are filed on the medication in order to block a lower cost generic from coming to market.

In October, the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review published its first annual report on unjustified price increases of prescription drugs in our country. It should surprise no one that HUMIRA, the poster child for patent gaming, led the list. HUMIRA's price increased by nearly 16 percent from 2017 to 2018, costing American patients and insureds an extra $1.86 billion. Why do we want to wait any longer, and how did HUMIRA do it? It once again put up

this patent thicket—its manufacturer did—in order to block the lower price biosimilar.

The Judiciary Committee has advanced bills that empower the Federal Trade Commission to take more aggressive action on drug pricing. This year, the FTC charged the infamous Martin Shkreli with a scheme to increase the price of the lifesaving drug Daraprim by more than 4,000 percent overnight, which was the focus of an Aging Committee investigation that I led with former Senator Claire McCaskill in 2016.

Floor consideration should also allow for action on other important prescription drug bills, such as legislation that Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN and I have authored to eliminate incentives that create price hikes, distorting the insulin market. Insulin has been around for 100 years. I realize there is fast-acting and slow-acting insulin, but there is no excuse for the skyrocketing price of insulin.

There is another bill that I cosponsored, introduced by Senators KLOBUCHAR and GRASSLEY, that would end pay-for-delay schemes.

We must come together on prescription drug legislation without further delay. Three committees have produced strong bipartisan bills, and we should proceed to act and pass this legislation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Mr. President, I join my colleagues today in calling on this body to include the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act of 2020 in the next coronavirus relief bill so that we can finally address the high cost of prescription drugs.

The troubles caused by skyrocketing drug prices are a never-ending source of worry and hardship for Mississippians and people across this entire country. I hear about this issue from constituents more than just about any other issue when I go home. I hear this all the time. I go to church with people who have to decide whether they are going to buy their drugs or buy food. That is a reality we live with.

Let me highlight a few stories shared with me by some of my constituents.

Emily Quinn lives in Fulton, MS. Her husband, Brian, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 2 and continues to rely on insulin daily. Her son Dylan, who is now 16, was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at the age of 6. The Quinn family pays more than $2,700 each month for just Brian's and Dylan's insulin, not including other diabetic equipment and supplies that they have to have.

It is shocking that more than a century—a century, not a decade; a century, 100 years—after insulin was discovered, insulin prices continue to rise by staggering amounts, nearly 300 percent over the last 10 years.

Scott Crawford of Jackson, MS, is a volunteer advocate for multiple sclerosis. Scott was diagnosed with primary progressive MS in 2002. Only one drug, named OCREVUS, can help slow the advancement of this disabling disease. That drug costs a staggering $65,000 a year—more than most Mississippians make. Even with good insurance coverage, Scott cannot afford the $15,000 copay for OCREVUS, so he just goes without.

MS drugs have seen some of the most shocking price increases of all, with list prices rising nearly 450 percent over the last 10 years.

Two young neurologists in Mississippi told me about their Medicare patients who quickly move into the catastrophic phase of Medicare Part D early each year. Even though these patients face only a 5-percent out-of-pocket cost for their drugs in this phase, that small percentage can amount to thousands of dollars for the expensive neurology drugs these patients depend on. Because there is currently no Medicare Part D out-of-pocket cap, these patients will get no relief from high drug prices later in the year when they still have to have them.

These are just a few of the many stories that I have received from Mississippians. I have one of my own as well.

My mother, a Medicare beneficiary living in Monticello, MS—Hyde, Lorraine—faced $454.50—right there—in out-of-pocket costs for her prescription eye drops earlier this year. A tiny bottle of eye drops cost $454.50. The drug, RESTASIS, has been on the market well over a decade—more than enough time for Allergan, the pharmaceutical company that developed the drug, to recoup its investment. Yet the average wholesale price of this drug has increased almost 250 percent in 10 years. It was almost unbelievable when my mom called me and told me what she paid for eye drops.

This case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court because Allergan had undertaken what I consider one of the most blatantly anti-competitive schemes in the history of the pharmaceutical industry. Fearing competition after its RESTASIS patent expired in 2014, Allergan transferred the patents to a Native American Tribe in an attempt to use the Tribe's sovereign immunity to shield Allergan against competition from lower priced generic alternatives. As I said, this case went all the way to the Supreme Court in 2018.

Even though the Supreme Court ultimately ruled this scheme was illegal, the company's underhanded ploy successfully delayed competition while it continued to reap outrageous benefits from RESTASIS, costing the U.S. healthcare system over $2 billion per year because of their monopoly pricing.

We want pharmaceutical companies to succeed. The great cures and treatments they discover improve the lives of many, many Americans. We recognize that fact. But these cures and therapeutics can only save lives if the patients can afford them. Too many Mississippians and individuals across this country cannot afford their prescription drugs due to the anti-competitive prices of companies—like Allergan—that continue to increase their prices year after year.

Today, the threat of the coronavirus pandemic has only increased concerns about drug pricing. As new vaccines and treatments for COVID–19 are being tested and developed, the affordability of prescription drugs is more important than ever. Just as much as we need a vaccine or treatment to be discovered, we also need it to be affordable for Americans if we are going to get on the other side of this pandemic.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of the Finance Committee chairman's comprehensive Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act to bring affordability and fairness to the prescription drug market. This bill must be an immediate priority for us as leaders if we are serious—if we are serious—about helping patients afford the drugs they need.

This important legislation would create a true out-of-pocket cap for Medicare beneficiaries, reinforce the market forces that have supported the research and development of so many miracle cures, keep pharmaceutical companies from price gouging, prevent taxpayers from being on the hook for unlimited price hacks that have no basis in the free market, stop the hurtful tactics of pharmacy benefit managers that hurt patients and community pharmacies while enriching the middlemen.

These reforms could reduce out-of-pocket spending on prescription drugs by $72 billion, reduce premiums by $1 billion, and save taxpayers $95 billion. The Congressional Budget Office anticipates those savings will spill over into even more savings in the commercial health market.

This is a priority that should transcend party politics. Yet Democrats who had previously supported Chairman GRASSLEY's reform legislation have walked away from the drug pricing negotiation table altogether. They would rather deny President Trump a victory on this issue than help the millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet due to high drug costs. There is no doubt about it: They are putting election-year politics ahead of making prescription drugs affordable for the American people.

The American people can't wait. Every month they continue to block this vital legislation is another month of thousands of dollars in insulin expenses for the Quinn family in Fulton, MS. Every month delayed is another month that Scott Crawford's MS advances because he cannot afford his medications. Every month is another month that those neurologists in Jackson will continue to worry about their patients on Medicare who face unlimited expenses due to no out-of-pocket cap.

These patients, and millions more like them, cannot wait until next year

or until the coronavirus pandemic passes or until Democrats decide to put the American people over politics.

Mississippians and Americans need a solution now. My friend the Senator from Iowa has done the hard work of writing a bill over the past 18 months that can address the heart of the issue and garner bipartisan consensus. I call on my colleagues to include the Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act in the next coronavirus relief package.

I have been very excited to work on this. This is one of the very reasons that I came to Washington, DC—to help Mississippians.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Ms. MCSALLY. Mr. President, I want to thank Chairman GRASSLEY for his tireless leadership on lowering the cost of prescription drugs for Americans. I am proud to join with him on the floor today and join him in his legislation that we must pass to help Americans and to help Arizonans.

Everywhere I go—and when I am hearing from Arizonans—I am constantly hearing about the rising costs of prescription drugs. It is among one of their top and most pressing concerns. From seniors who can't afford their medications to parents struggling to care for a child who suffers from chronic conditions, out-of-pocket drug costs are too high. Far too many seniors and hard-working individuals in our State either can't afford both their groceries and their medications or they have been forced to ration their prescriptions because of skyrocketing drug costs.

In 2017, AARP Arizona reported that a whopping 26 percent of our residents stopped taking their medications as prescribed due to cost.

Last fall, I heard from a constituent in her midsixties from Green Valley, AZ, who was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and taking several medications to treat her condition. When she transitioned to Medicare Part D from her employer's health plan, her out-of-pocket costs for one of the drugs she was taking—Enbrel—went from $10 per month to nearly $6,000 per month. This is a 600-percent increase in her monthly out-of-pocket costs just for this drug alone. I don't know anybody who can afford $6,000 a month for one drug as a senior—as anyone. This is insane. She had to switch to another medication twice, but because they were infusions, she now has to travel 84 miles round trip to get treated. The significant jump in drug costs have affected both her pocketbook even her quality of life.

This is unacceptable, and I have worked with my Senate colleagues on both sides of the aisle, with Chairman GRASSLEY's leadership, over the past year and a half since I have been in the Senate to bring down the costs of drugs and help Americans save more of their money.

Senator GRASSLEY's bill, of which I am proud to be an original cosponsor, does just that by holding Big Pharma companies accountable for exploiting loopholes and keeping pricing high for seniors, families, and taxpayers. Our bill pulls back the curtain on drug pricing and negotiations. It ends the sticker shock at the pharmacy counter, and it caps out-of-pocket costs for seniors so that Arizonans can afford the medicines they need.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, our Prescription Drug Pricing Reduction Act would save taxpayers close to $95 billion, reduce out-of-pocket spending by $72 billion, and reduce premiums by $1 billion.

This bill is even more important now that we are navigating a global pandemic and its subsequent economic challenges that are squeezing family and fixed-income senior budgets even more than in normal times. With over 17 million Americans unemployed—including many Arizonans—along with the ever-looming threat of the coronavirus, affording prescription medicine should be the least of their concerns. Our bill would give Americans and Arizonans one less thing to worry about during these extraordinarily difficult and unprecedented times.

Unfortunately, despite this bill receiving strong bipartisan support until just a few months ago, Democrats recently chose to walk away at the direction of their party's leadership, and they refused to join in on the reintroduction of this legislation that they coauthored. This happens only in DC.

Just to be clear: They were for it before they were against it. This is maddening. This is why people all over my State are so frustrated with the dysfunction in this place, where people are willing to put looking for power and electoral politics ahead of what people need right now. Right now they need relief. They need relief to lower their out-of-pocket costs for all of the issues that they are facing as seniors, as families—any of the diagnoses, any of the conditions. These lifesaving and quality-of-life-improving medicines—we have to lower the costs, and now is the time to do it. Arizona patients and taxpayers and families and seniors need Washington to act now.

I want to urge our Democratic colleagues to put politics aside. I know it is hard to do in an election year, but put it aside. Service before self—that is one of the core values I learned in the Air Force. I bring it here with me today.

Serving others first—that is why you are here. Put those politics aside. Let's act to lower the out-of-pocket costs of prescription drugs in our upcoming coronavirus relief bill.

This is a pivotal moment for action. We have to come together as a Congress to ensure hard-working Americans, their families, and seniors can access the treatments they need at an affordable cost.

Let's pass this bill now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

S. 4049

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise, together with the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, to talk about the chairman's plan to conclude the deliberations of the legislation before us today.

As you well know from being in the committee, this was a process that was bipartisan, thoughtful, extremely well-orchestrated by the chairman, and we accomplished a great deal. As you know, the members of the committee—we considered literally hundreds of different amendments by the members as we marked up the legislation. Then we passed the bill out of committee, we brought it to the floor, and at that point, a total of 880 amendments were filed on the legislation—446 Republican amendments, 422 Democratic amendments, and 12 joint amendments. So we had a rich field to pick from in terms of trying to improve the legislation.

The first substitute that was introduced on the floor to begin formal deliberation included a total of 79 amendments—34 Republican amendments, 34 Democratic amendments, and 11 joint amendments. Then we proceeded forward. Last week we came up with another unanimous consent to allow the votes that took place this week on several very important amendments, but in addition to that, we incorporated another legislative proposal including 62 amendments.

So from the introduction of the bill to the floor and to this moment, we have adopted 141 amendments. They are bipartisan, both Democrats and Republicans. Now we are at the point—and the chairman, I believe, has a very thoughtful way to conclude the legislation—to consider another round of amendments and then be able to move to final passage very quickly.

Again, let me conclude by saying that the chairman has done a remarkable job. I commend him for his bipartisanship, his thoughtfulness, and his consideration, and I am completely supportive of his proposal to bring this bill to a conclusion.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, first of all, can I say Senator REED has been incredibly great in this whole process. We have been working on this for a whole year now, and we are now to the point where tomorrow we should be able to pass it out of—it will not be passed at that time. We also have a conference we are going to have to be faced with and all that, but today and tomorrow morning are very important to us.

The point that is made by Senator REED—if you add up all the amendments, really, it is you guys in the Senate who have drafted this bill. Not only are there 141 amendments since we came out of the committee, but in

the committee, we had over 800 amendments that were part of the bill to start with.

One of the reasons—and I think I speak for Senator REED and myself at the same time. We have had some experiences in the past where, since the Senate operates with unanimous consent, we were unable to have any amendments at all on the floor. So in order to do that, to make sure—if that should happen again, we wanted to make sure we had all these amendments already in the bill. So that was our starting point.

Now, here is where we are today. We had a great vote on the NDAA, receiving an 87-to-13 vote in favor of ending debate on the substitute. That was great. That was today. That means we are at kind of the end of this process now. We have continued to work on another managers' package.

Last night we hotlined—a lot of the people who may be watching are not familiar with the terminology. We hotlined—we sent out to all the Democrats and all the Republicans for any objections they might have—another group of amendments. It was a large group, an equal number of amendments for Democrats and Republicans. It came back, and there were a lot of objections to it, so we have now taken that and started on one last managers' package that we are going to be—a modified version that we are going to hotline tonight.

It is very important that people are listening right now. A lot of times people aren't listening. Certainly, the staffs should let their Members know that they are going to get a hotline on actually 40 amendments—20 Democratic amendments, 20 Republican amendments—tonight. That is going to be the hotline they are going to look at. Some of your staff and some of the Members may not have read these amendments yet. It is likely that is the case. If you have objections to amendments in this package—that is what we are hotlining—we encourage you to lodge those objections with the Cloakroom. That is when you get these things. That is going to be tonight. We will note those objections and see what remains.

Tomorrow morning—let's say all the objections have come in. Tomorrow morning, at a time—we were hoping that time was going to be around 10:30 tomorrow, but we know a lot of people want to talk; a lot of people want to be heard. We can't control that, but we will ask for unanimous consent to pass the package with a balanced number of amendments from both Democrats and Republicans. This is tomorrow, hopefully at 10:30, but maybe that will not work.

We will require Members who want to object to this final package to come down to the floor in person and object. If you already have an objection to a specific amendment in this package registered with the Cloakroom, the amendment should have been pulled from the package. It will not even appear at that time. Otherwise, you need to be here to object in person.

We use the term ''balanced.'' This is how this works. We have 40 amendments that are going to be hotlined tonight. If the Republicans have eight of them that they object to and the Democrats have seven they object to, they have to find one more to object to so it ends up being eight and eight or so that the number will be equal. It sounds a little complicated and it sounds like something that might not work, but it will work. We have been doing this now for over a year. Actually, we started this process 2 years ago. So it is going to be the responsibility of the Democrats and the Republicans to make that even so that no one can say that it is biased to one side.

So all of that is what is going to happen, and it is very important that staff and Members be aware of that because what we don't want to happen is to have someone come along and say they were not aware of this process that is in place. So that is the process we are going to use, and that is one that is fair.

Again, I don't think—and this will be the 60th consecutive year. There has never been a year, in my memory, that has had more amendments considered than we have considered this year.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

REINFORCING AMERICAN-MADE PRODUCTS ACT OF 2020

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, when Americans see a ''Made in the U.S.A.'' label on a product, it is a source of great pride, and justifiably so. It represents the American virtues of entrepreneurialism and industriousness. It also alludes to the fact that, as Americans, we have a common sense of destiny and a common appreciation for the inherent dignity and eternal worth of the human soul. It is a symbol of support for American manufacturing jobs, for local communities, and for high-quality products. So it often spurs American consumers as well as foreign consumers to buy a particular product—a product lucky enough to have that label.

The Federal Trade Commission currently enforces a difficult standard for all products that want to claim the ''Made in the U.S.A.'' label. It requires that ''all or virtually all'' of a product be made in the United States, and it has issued a lengthy legal guidance document—or a series thereof—establishing rules for who may and may not claim that title.

However, one State holds a different standard—one that is nearly impossible for businesses to meet. Under California's law, if more than 5 percent of the components of a particular product are manufactured outside the United States—even if that means just a few bolts or a few screws—that product cannot lawfully be labeled ''Made in the U.S.A.''

Because of the flow of interstate and international commerce, in which most manufacturers sell wholesale to national and international distributors who then disperse products all throughout the country, the other 49 States are forced to comply with this one—the most rigid definition—in order to avoid costly litigation.

For many practical purposes, this just means they can't use the label. It makes it impracticable as a business matter and not feasible as a legal matter for them to claim that label. Even though they could legally boast the ''Made in the U.S.A.'' claim in every other State in the country, California makes it more or less impossible for them to do so. In other words, a single State is effectively dictating a country-of-origin label. Think about that for a minute.

If California or any other State in the Union, for that matter, would like to create a State-of-origin label, I have no issue with such a State doing that and wouldn't suggest that the Federal Government ought to undo those parameters. But as it currently stands, the California law undermines Congress's rightful authority to regulate interstate commerce and needlessly hurts American manufacturers.

This is one of the reasons we are our own country. This is one of the reasons we fly the Stars and Stripes. It is one of the reasons the Constitution came into existence to begin with—to give Congress the power to regulate commerce between the several States with foreign nations and with Indians Tribes. Our previous form of government, under the Articles of Confederation, didn't create a Congress that had that power. As a result, in the early days following the American Revolution, States were engaging in activities amounting to economic Balkanization. We saw economic Balkanization among and between the States. That is why our Founding Fathers gathered in that hot, fateful, and sweltering summer of 1787 in Philadelphia—for this very reason.

The Reinforcing American-Made Products Act would solve this very problem. It would simply ensure that the FTC has the exclusive authority to set the national standard for ''Made in the U.S.A.'' labeling. The legislation would provide clarity and consistency, helping American companies to avoid unnecessary hardships and frivolous lawsuits that would otherwise deter them from using this coveted and justifiably enviable label of ''Made in the U.S.A.''

Now more than ever, in the midst of the economic turmoil associated with the global pandemic, we ought to be doing all we can to support American jobs and to strengthen our local communities. This legislation would help us accomplish just that. I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of it.