

the University of Washington helped us immensely in saving our shellfish industry. We now need to do more for fisheries across the United States. We need to invest in things that I call salmon infrastructure to keep—as we continue to grow our economy and continue to move forward on infrastructure, that we are also keeping ways to return salmon.

I think this is one of the most important things Governor Raimondo can do as Secretary of Commerce—restore the respect for the scientific process, the scientific community, and the important issues that are going to be at the heart of how our coastal economies are impacted by climate.

I have invited Governor Raimondo to take one of her first trips to the State of Washington to see exactly how our State has dealt with these fishery issues. I know that the Presiding Officer from California knows how important the seafood industry is and the impacts to our coastal communities because of climate as well. We need a leader in the Department of Commerce who is going to help us mitigate and adapt to those impacts.

I am also counting on Governor Raimondo to help us with our export economy, everything from our ports to farmers to aerospace. Exports mean jobs, and about one in four jobs in the State of Washington is related to trade.

Frankly, I think she is a departure from the last President and the last Commerce Secretary, Wilbur Ross. I think he and the President spent a lot more time shaking their fists at the world community than engaging them on policies that were really going to open up markets and help us move forward with getting our products in the door.

Ninety-six percent of the world's customers live outside of the United States, and prior to the COVID pandemic, half of the world's population had reached middle class. That means that is a big market, almost 4 billion people. U.S. exporters need to be able to reach those markets and to grow the U.S. economy and grow U.S. jobs.

We need to work with our allies, like Europe and Japan, to meet the real challenges we face from China. We need to expand U.S. exports in other fast-growing markets around Asia and South America and around the world. The Department of Commerce has a key role in promoting those exports and helping our companies enter new markets, and U.S. commercial service officials are on the frontlines of these issues around the globe.

I know Governor Raimondo understands the importance of this export market, and she understands that the Department of Commerce can play a very big role in it. I hope that she will get to work soon on working within the Biden administration to make this a big priority.

I also want to say that I know she is going to, on other science Agencies

within the Department of Commerce, play a critical role, everything from the National Institute of Science and Technology—a small Agency that doesn't get a lot of attention, but it is very consensus-based on standards and fostering growth in a number of industries that are so important to communications and manufacturing and public safety.

So I hope that she will use, again, her private sector experience in knowing where to invest in new technologies to help us continue to grow economies like the space economy that we have in the State of Washington. We are very proud that, as commercial space travel has started to be a major focus of the private sector, it has grown many businesses and many jobs in our State in that area, and we want to see it continue to grow.

But we need Governor Raimondo's leadership on the important policies that divide us on these issues. The U.S.-EU Privacy Shield agreement is such a negotiation. I know my colleague Senator WICKER, who has been very involved in these discussions and negotiations, knows exactly how important digital trade is, and Commerce is leading up these talks to resolve these disputes.

We must ensure the continued free flow of commercial data between the United States and Europe. A lot is at stake. The U.S. and EU digital trade is worth more than \$300 billion annually and includes more than \$218 billion in U.S. exports to Europe. Every business that exports or imports or has a presence in investment in the United States or Europe will face difficulties if we don't resolve these issues and barriers to cross-border data transfer.

So all of this is very big risk, and we want Governor Raimondo to get to work on this very quickly and help resolve these issues.

The free flow of data between the United States and Europe is critical to 5,000 tech companies in my State and more than \$2.8 billion of digital exports in our economy. So I am pretty sure that this is the same—as I said to the Presiding Officer, I know he gets how important digital trade is to the State of California and would like to see these issues addressed as well.

So these are very big challenges for the Department of Commerce and the next Commerce Secretary to basically make sure that the impacts of COVID are dealt with in our economy and to usher in a new era of an information age by making the right investments and depending on science to help our key coastal communities that also have been greatly impacted, using and harnessing the aspects of NOAA and really bringing in the type of leadership we need at the Department of Commerce to resolve our problems as a new digital age emerges here on an international basis and continue to allow our economy to grow. I know she is the right choice. I urge my colleagues to support her nomination.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, this week our Democratic colleagues are striving to break Congress's perfect record of bipartisan pandemic relief. Last year, five relief packages were signed into law, each with overwhelming bipartisan support. No bill received fewer than 90 votes here in the Senate, and 1 even passed unanimously. The reason why these bills received such broad support is because they address the crisis at hand in a targeted manner; no controversial provisions or unrelated partisan priorities, just clear-cut relief for the American people.

As I said, the perfect record of commonsense, bipartisan relief packages will apparently end this week.

The bill our Democratic colleagues are preparing to bring to the Senate floor has been drafted by only one party. As you can imagine, that process lends itself to a sort of partisan Christmas tree decorating. Democrats have taken the framework of the COVID relief bill and added a range of liberal priorities that have absolutely nothing to do with COVID-19: a Silicon Valley subway system, a blank check for mismanaged union pension plans, a bridge from New York to Canada, and funding for climate justice.

It is no surprise that this bill passed the House on a strict party-line vote. But the COVID-19 relief label isn't fooling anybody. This is a partisan wish list that does more to advance a political agenda than to respond to the legitimate public health and economic needs of our country. That is why our Democratic colleagues have chosen to abuse the budget reconciliation process in order to make a law.

Based on the pricetag of this bill, you would think it was March 2020 all over again. Despite the fact that we have made serious headway in vaccinations, our economy is recovering by leaps and bounds, and all signs show we are moving toward that light at the end of the tunnel, our Democratic colleagues are prepared to spend another \$1.9 trillion of borrowed money. That is about half as much as all previous bills combined.

What is even more concerning than the cost is how the money is going to be spent. One great example is funding for education. So far, Congress has provided more than \$110 billion for K-12 education, including \$68 billion in the relief bill that was signed into law in December, just a couple of months ago. Schools in Texas have used this money to update air filtration systems, purchase personal protective equipment,

and implement regular disinfecting so students and teachers can safely return to the classroom. After all, we know in-person instruction is best for our children.

I have had sections of my State where at least a third of the lower income students don't have dependable access to broadband, much less the kind of supervision that they would need in order to continue their learning. Study after study has shown that kids have fallen behind while learning virtually, especially in foundational subjects like math and reading.

The learning deficit is even greater for students of color and those in high-poverty communities. One study found that, for math, White students began the school year about 1 to 3 months behind in learning while students of color were more likely to be 3 to 5 months behind. And the impact on our students isn't purely academic. As we know, there are serious mental, social, and emotional tolls to be paid as well.

We need our schools to open, and, of course, we need to do so safely. The experts tell us that not only is that possible, but it has already been done in States across the country. The Centers for Disease Control published a report in January that found: "There has been little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission." The lead author of that report affirmed that even in places with high infection rates, there is no evidence that schools will transmit the virus at a higher rate than the general community. In short, schools are not a breeding ground for COVID-19 as long as appropriate precautions are taken, and they can reopen safely.

The good news is there is already plenty of funding to make that happen. In December, the Centers for Disease Control estimated schools would need about \$22 billion to open safely. As of February 9, of the \$68 billion that was provided for K-12 schools in the combined relief packages, only about \$5 billion has been spent. So \$68 billion has been provided, and only \$5 billion has been spent.

Despite clear evidence that, one, kids are struggling with virtual learning; two, schools can safely reopen with the right precautions; and, three, that there is plenty of funding to help schools implement these measures, our Democratic colleagues are prepared to spend another \$130 billion for K-12 education without any sort of incentive or requirement for children to return safely to the classroom.

Sadly, many of our schoolchildren are coming up on the 1-year anniversary of their virtual learning. Unfortunately, there seems to be very little momentum for letting those students return to the classroom, and, unfortunately, by default, they are falling further behind.

Since most of the existing funds remain to be spent, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that

the bulk of spending of this new proposed funding would occur next year and beyond. In other words, this isn't an emergency relief bill designed to deal with the present need; this is about spending money in 2021, after which, hopefully, virtually everybody in the United States is vaccinated and we have established herd immunity.

Only \$6.4 billion would be distributed through September of this year, and the remaining \$122 billion would trickle out the door through not just 2021 but through 2028. That is, the majority of the education funding in the so-called and misnamed COVID-19 relief bill wouldn't even be touched until the pandemic has been put in the rearview mirror.

Now, I have advocated for funding to help schools prepare for a safe return to the classroom, and, of course, the experts, as I said, have told us that more than enough funding is already available to make that happen. So I ask: What is the rationale for asking the taxpayers to foot another \$130 billion bill if there is no need for that funding in the first place? And I would add to that, this is not money that actually exists. This will be money borrowed from future generations that is added to the deficit and to our debt. There is certainly no excuse to ram this and a range of other partisan priorities through Congress without the support of a single Republican.

It was January 20 when I thought that President Biden gave a very eloquent and appropriate speech at his inauguration, talking about the need for the Nation to heal, for the divisions to heal, and for unity, but doing this partisan reconciliation bill when there is no demonstrated need for this deficit spending is not healing the divisions in our country or promoting unity.

Saturday will mark 1 year since the first COVID-19 response bill was signed into law. Since then we have, tragically, lost more than a half million Americans; families have struggled with job losses; small businesses have closed their doors; and children have fallen further and further behind.

The list of hardships endured over the past year is long indeed, but now our colleagues across the aisle are trying to capitalize on that pain by passing the so-called and misnamed COVID-19 relief bill that does more to advance partisan goals than to bring an end to this national nightmare. It does nothing to get our kids back in school or our American workers back on the job.

It doles out taxpayer dollars for favored infrastructure projects—these are colloquially called earmarks—like the bridge in the majority leader's home State of New York and a subway system in the Speaker's home State of California. What do those have to do with COVID-19? Where is the emergency there? Why should we borrow money from future generations to fund these infrastructure projects that have nothing to do with the pandemic?

We can deal with infrastructure, and we should, going forward, but opportunistically exploiting the public's concern about COVID-19 in order to fund these infrastructure projects in New York and California is simply inexcusable.

(Mr. LUJAN assumed the Chair.)

Only 1 percent of the funding in this massive \$1.9 trillion bill goes toward vaccination efforts. We all understand that vaccinating the American people is the key for ending this crisis. So far—and I am sure I am a day or so behind—a couple of days ago, we vaccinated 68 million people—68 million vaccinations, perhaps. Some of them involved two shots. And we are vaccinating people at the rate of 3 million shots a day. That is really, really encouraging. But only 1 percent of the funding in this \$1.9 trillion bill goes toward that eventual key to unlocking the future.

As I said, every penny that is spent on pandemic response is borrowed from our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren. Somebody is going to have to pay the money back—not us, not now, apparently. We are going to borrow the money, add to deficits and debt.

As Larry Summers and others have said, we are even risking inflation by throwing so much money into the economy so quickly, at a time when it is growing at more than 4 percent a year. And we are not, if this effort is successful, spending this money responsibly. Being responsible means doing what is needed—no more, no less—to bring this pandemic to an end and get this country back on its feet.

I think this bill is a shameful waste of taxpayer dollars. And it is outrageous that it is entitled the COVID-19 relief bill when so little of this bill actually deals with the pandemic. As we say, where I come from, if you put lipstick on a pig, it is still a pig.

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. President, I didn't know our colleague from New Mexico was going to be the Presiding Officer now, but being our next-door neighbor, maybe he will appreciate a little short speech about Texas Independence Day.

One hundred eighty-five years ago, on March 2, 1836, Texas adopted its Declaration of Independence from Mexico. This happened in the context of a struggle that perhaps is best remembered by the Battle of the Alamo, which laid some of the groundwork to Texans—or as they called themselves back then, Texians—eventual victory.

I always remind people that virtually everybody died at the Battle of the Alamo. It was actually the Battle of San Jacinto that won the war. But just 1 week shy of this momentous day, a 26-year-old lieutenant colonel in the Texas Army named William Barrett Travis and his fellow soldiers were outnumbered nearly 10 to 1 by the forces of the Mexican dictator, Antonio López de Santa Anna. Colonel Travis wrote a letter that has arguably become the most famous document in Texas history.