

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

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

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

I think that happens in the Federal Government as well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Before you think that doesn't happen, oh, yes, it does. It happens all the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When it comes to abortion, Attorney General Becerra doesn't believe there should be any restrictions—not one. In fact, I had the chance to ask Mr. Becerra some questions a couple of weeks ago at a hearing. I asked if he would support a ban on the lethal discrimination of babies diagnosed with

Down syndrome, or, perhaps, what about banning sex-selective abortions, or, at least, a ban on partial birth abortions. His refusal to answer spoke volumes. His inability to name even one restriction that he might think about putting on abortion is chilling.

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

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

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

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

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

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, the stated mission of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is "to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans." It is a laudable goal. The HHS Secretary is, thus, charged with overseeing all government healthcare and social services and protecting the health and the rights of the American people, a worthy goal, important job. Unfortunately, the history of the nominee before us, Mr. Xavier Becerra,

poses grave concerns to our ability to carry out this goal and to our ability to oversee an Agency with such vast, far-reaching responsibilities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

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

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

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

The more people learn about what the Biden White House is up to the

more questions they have for those of us who represent them.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

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

There are, unfortunately, numerous nominees in the Biden administration who are either extreme or unqualified

for the positions for which they have been nominated, but of all of those nominees, I believe Mr. Becerra is the single worst Cabinet nominee put forward by Joe Biden to serve in the Cabinet.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

doesn't care about privacy and has a record of ignoring your right to privacy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Do you want an HHS Secretary who doesn't respect your privacy, who doesn't respect your free speech or religious liberty? Do you want an HHS

Secretary who is not qualified to draw blood or give a shot, who doesn't know how to distribute vaccines, who has never distributed anything?

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

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

They not only want to end Medicaid expansion—end it completely—they want to cut the Medicaid Program by hundreds of billions of dollars over 10 years. That is their official position. It has been their position for years to cut the Medicaid Program and to end Medicaid expansion—cut the Medicaid Program by hundreds of billions of dollars.

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

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

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

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

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

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

I yield the floor.

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

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

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

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

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 798

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Oregon.

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

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

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The junior Senator from Florida.

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

Let's be clear. By objecting to this bill, Democrats are standing in full support of spending \$2 billion to send

\$1,400 checks to inmates. Democrats want to spend \$2 billion in taxpayer money to send checks to people in prison, convicted of committing serious crimes and victimizing their fellow Americans.

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

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

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

Thank you, Madam President.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ST. PATRICK'S DAY

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

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

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

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

Their anti-choice, anti-woman, and anti-health rhetoric is on full display here on the Senate floor, and, sadly, it is not new. They want to roll back Roe v. Wade. They want to criminalize abortion care. They want the government to control women and their bodies. They want to roll back title IX protections for women on university

campuses and completely gut the title X program to fund critical healthcare providers like Planned Parenthood.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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