

miles an hour, when, suddenly, they heard a loud noise and saw the shuttle begin to come apart.

We soon realized that the worst had happened: The shuttle broke into several pieces as it reentered Earth's atmosphere, and all seven astronauts aboard lost their lives.

The crew of *Columbia* included two Texans: Rick Husband and Willie McCool, along with Michael Anderson, Kalpana Chawla, David Brown, Laurel Clark, and Ilan Ramon. They were scheduled to land at Kennedy Space Center just 15 minutes after passing over Texas.

The disaster left a field of wreckage that stretched from Fort Worth, across East Texas, and into Louisiana. Texas is a big place, but that means virtually the whole breadth of our State was covered with wreckage.

The government, of course, immediately launched a massive search to recover pieces of the space shuttle in order to determine what went wrong. NASA officials, National Guard troops, and law enforcement at all levels began scouring the landscape to recover pieces of the shuttle. Divers from the Environmental Protection Agency led efforts to recover pieces that fell into the Toledo Bend Reservoir near Hemp-hill.

Some 25,000 volunteers from Texas and Louisiana helped search an area that covered 2.3 million acres. They ranged from college students at nearby Stephen F. Austin to teams of ham radio operators who helped law enforcement with communications. As Texans and Americans do, people from all walks of life came together at a time of tragedy and rallied behind a unified effort to help bring answers to a nation in mourning.

This tragedy happened just a couple of months into my first Senate term, and I witnessed this massive response effort in action.

In the aftermath, I visited an area in Nacogdoches, which is over in East Texas, where tents were set up by search teams. It was remarkable to see the dedication of men and women firsthand engaged in this effort.

Search crews battled the rain and cold temperatures as they combed through pine forests and underbrush searching for wreckage. Recovery teams and volunteers found everything from a 600-pound piece of a main engine to the sole of a spacesuit boot. These discoveries, of course, were crucial to the investigation, which helped NASA understand what went wrong and how we could prevent similar accidents from occurring in the future.

In the months and years since, the Agency underwent an extensive transformation of its culture and operations to improve the safety of future missions. Jon Clark, a former NASA flight surgeon, whose wife Laurel was killed on *Columbia* said:

Their sacrifice has evolved into a safer space program.

Those changes are no consolation for the families who lost loved ones 20

years ago today, but I hope they can find some comfort in the knowledge that these American heroes made a lasting impact on America's space program.

I appreciate the Texans who came together in the wake of this tragedy to preserve pieces of *Columbia* and provide NASA and these families with answers that they so earnestly sought. Their efforts, then and now, have helped make the Nation's space program safer and more successful.

As we mark the 20th anniversary of the loss of *Columbia*, I am proud to co-sponsor a Senate resolution to commemorate the loss of *Columbia* and honor its crew. I appreciate the bipartisan support of Senators on both sides of the aisle who have joined in this effort, and I hope the resolution will pass unanimously today.

Today, we pay tribute to seven courageous individuals who lost their lives aboard the Space Shuttle *Columbia*. We remember, we honor, and we celebrate their commitment to research, exploration, and the pursuit of the extraordinary. We honor their legacy by continuing to push the boundaries of scientific discovery and human space.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:30 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. ROSEN).

SUPPORTING THE OBSERVATION OF NATIONAL TRAFFICKING AND MODERN SLAVERY PREVENTION MONTH—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

INFLATION

Mrs. CAPITO. Madam President, I rise today to discuss yet another of the consequences of President Biden's policies, and that is that prices are going up, the price hikes.

Families in West Virginia and across our Nation are struggling because the policies and priorities of these past 2 years have made essential items and goods seemingly unattainable. Whether it is gas, goods or services, energy prices, utility costs, small business expenses, owning a home, or simply affording to put food on the table, American families are squeezed at every turn.

According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, prices have risen 13.7 percent since President Biden took office. A recent report from the Heritage Foundation found that because of that staggering rise, the average American family has \$7,400 less in their pocket at the end of the year.

This is a timely topic today because the Federal Reserve has just an-

nounced the eighth consecutive interest rate hike they have had to deploy in order to curb this administration's 2-year spending spree which is fueling our high-inflation economy. But an interest rate hike—once reserved as a measure that sends a direct signal to policymakers—is just another Wednesday in this President's America.

Chairman Powell warned last August that the continued interest rate increases and inflationary pressures would bring "pain to households and businesses." And, boy, does that ring true today. Meanwhile, President Biden continues to laud small inflation changes and slowed economic growth, but he refuses to recognize his administration's role in the record-high prices that the American middle class is continuing to have to face or the further economic fallout Americans are likely to face—projected by many economists—later this year from interest rate hikes in the past year.

So let's just dive into this a little bit. Whether it is a conversation with Senate colleagues, waiting in line at a store, or a constituent calling my office, the cost of food remains a central topic of concern all across this Nation. According to the most recent reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the cost of groceries went up 11.8 percent from the year prior. You hear about it with meat, eggs, bread, and butter—all the essentials. To add to this, the cost of restaurant purchases is up 8.4 percent. In fact, the price of every food category has continued to grow at a faster rate than its historical average.

A recent PBS analysis also points out that America's rural population is experiencing their cost of living going up faster and lingering longer than those in urban areas, and that is a factor that disproportionately impacts people in my State of West Virginia. In the words of one West Virginian who wrote in to my office, "How are we supposed to keep our houses warm and food on the table?"

Speaking of housing, it remains unaffordable. Because of President Biden's price hikes, fixed mortgage rates rose from 3.4 percent in January of 2022 to over double, 7.12 percent, in a matter of months. The National Association of Realtors' Housing Affordability Index dipped below 100, signifying that average American families do not have enough money to qualify for a mortgage on a median-priced home. In other words, new families and hard-working individuals who made smart financial decisions with the hope of purchasing a home can no longer pursue that dream because it is out of reach; it is unaffordable.

Moving to energy—something that is absolutely central to the proud history and tradition of our State, my State—despite the recent downturn in energy prices, it can't be forgotten that Americans are still paying 30 percent more for energy, and at its peak in June of 2022, it was 70 percent more. With costs

like this becoming more mainstream—actually, gas is going up just recently—American families are having to choose again between keeping their lights on, filling their car with gas, or buying groceries.

This is not only unfair, but it is avoidable. It is avoidable for folks living in a country with as many resources as we have right here in the United States. It also shows the direct impact on our families when leaders turn their backs on American energy.

Additionally, the U.S. manufacturing industry has not been exempt from the economic woes created by this administration. The Institute for Supply Management's manufacturing Purchasing Managers Index—that is a big clump of words there—fell into contraction category in November and December of 2022. Meanwhile, despite this, President Biden has been touting a historic manufacturing boom that doesn't really exist. The reality is, U.S. manufacturers may be on their way to a recession, and the downturn will likely deepen as purchasing power decreases and interest rates continue to rise, as they did today. This further demonstrates how out of touch the administration is from the devastating reality that American businesses are grappling with.

So if you don't believe me—I hope you do, but if you don't believe me, take it from my constituents. Back home, they write frequently to express the middle-class squeeze they are feeling. Erwin from Mercer County in Southern West Virginia said that the current economic condition has created a choice for him between driving to work and feeding his family.

Paige from Buckhannon said something similar. She said:

I have full time jobs and two children. I'm tearful because I sit here [wondering and] looking at upcoming bills and I'm having to . . . pay a bill or buy groceries.

Ronald from Cabell County, over in the Huntington area:

How do you propose that I continue to be able to live with increasing food prices—gasoline prices—and the ever-increasing utility costs?

Jeremy in Raleigh County told me:

My electric bill at my residence is double the cost of my mortgage every month. This is not sustainable. I will go bankrupt just trying to keep the lights on.

But this isn't just impacting Jeremy because Jeremy is a great family man and a great friend, and he is trying to help his friends, neighbors, and family pay their electric bills as well.

So I am continuously inspired by this kindness that I see and the generosity of West Virginians toward one another, but it shouldn't have to come to this.

So my question to President Biden this week is, When is enough enough? Even in areas where we have prices that are decreasing in recent months, President Biden is trying to take credit when, in actuality, prices are still much, much higher than when he took office.

Now more than ever, American families need leadership, not misleading messages and attempts to take credit when it is not deserved. American families are asking for a path out from the hole created by the price hikes my colleagues and I will continue to highlight on the Senate floor today.

With that, I see Senator HYDE-SMITH from the great State of Mississippi here to talk about, I am sure, similar issues. She has been a champion of affordability and the middle-class worker to try to help meet these very challenges that I outlined. So I welcome her.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Madam President, in less than a week, President Biden will deliver his State of the Union Address to the Nation. In the buildup to that speech, we are already seeing the President and his administration spinning a tale about just how wonderful things are in this country, particularly after they took power and racked up more than \$3 trillion more in spending. Unfortunately, those tall tales do not reflect the reality for the people in my home State of Mississippi or across the Nation.

In the 2 years since President Biden took office, we have seen his administration fail the American people time and time again. Inflation was 1.4 percent in January of 2021, but the policies the President has forced on this Nation since then have made daily living unaffordable for families. Today, a strong majority of Americans—more than 70 percent—believe that the country is on the wrong track, and it is easy to understand why. Too many workers and families now live paycheck to paycheck, trying to keep the lights on, put food on the table, get gas in their cars, and stock up on everyday essentials that they have to have.

President Biden's inflationary runaway spending is a root cause of the skyrocketed prices we are paying for all goods and services. Not a single industry is spared the cost of this inflation. Since Joe Biden took office, higher prices have cost families an additional \$10,000, and there seems to be no end in sight. Prices have gone up across the board to 13.5 percent, and grocery costs have jumped 18.6 percent. Just look at the price of essential staples: Chicken breast prices have gone up by 33 percent, and ground beef, whole milk, and bread have gone up by 21 percent.

Unlike President Biden, I actually have to take a trip to the grocery store to feed my family. I do all of my own shopping, and I see firsthand how these price increases affect the people of Mississippi. In the checkout line, I have watched a mother forced to put something back on the shelf after realizing that she can't afford everything in her cart. I have seen a retired husband grabbing only the barest necessities for the week. Up and down the aisle, as I push my buggy, the conversation is

constant on "Can you believe how much the price of groceries has increased and how expensive it is?"

It breaks my heart to see the individuals in my community and the Nation struggling to get by. It shouldn't be this way, but in Joe Biden's America, you are forced to weigh priorities on buying groceries, prescription medicine, or putting gas in your car.

When it comes to energy prices, the hardship continues for many Americans. This pain is 100 percent self-inflicted by the Biden administration's stubborn refusal to maximize American energy production. According to census data, about 22 percent of American households could not pay their energy bill last year. When families were actually able to pay, they had to sacrifice other necessities, such as groceries, their medicine, or their gasoline.

This winter isn't bringing any relief either. Compared to last winter, the average household will spend upwards of 28 percent more to heat their home with natural gas, according to the Energy Information Administration. Electricity rates are also expected to continue to rise due to lower domestic supply of liquefied natural gas as well as labor shortages and the cost of materials. But this should come as no surprise since the attack on American energy began on day one of the Biden Presidency. In fact, this administration's regulatory overreach also contributes to rising costs across our economy.

Despite record-high prices, Joe Biden wants to further regulate the agriculture industry. The Food Safety and Inspection Service, for instance, is studying line speeds of poultry plants with the ultimate goal of just slowing them down, which will affect costs and supplies in the grocery stores. In addition, the EPA recently unveiled its new waters of the United States rule, which will further hamper the ability of farmers to grow food because the Federal Government will have the ability to regulate ditches and low spots on private land.

It is a basic fact that it is expensive to comply with overly burdensome regulations. The Biden administration's desire to overregulate everything makes it seem as if the President wants Americans to struggle to afford food.

Madam President, the American people are smart, and they understand when things aren't going well.

The rosy stories the White House will barrage us with before the State of the Union Address won't change the fact that the American dream seems further from attainable for hard-working families because we just cannot afford Joe Biden.

My colleagues and I want to get our economy back on track to relieve the financial stress that families are experiencing. We must stop the irresponsible government spending, unleash

American energy production, cut regulations, and embrace pro-growth commonsense policies. The American people deserve that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, I am pleased to rise today and join my colleagues from West Virginia and Mississippi, and I join them to, once again, call attention to the disastrous effects of President Biden's price hikes and his policies.

Americans are facing soaring inflation that has not been seen in generations. Price increases families are seeing at the grocery store, at the pump, in monthly electric bills, and for basic housing needs have far outpaced wage gains and left Americans struggling to make ends meet.

The numbers speak for themselves. In 2022, annual average inflation reached 8 percent, the highest level in 40 years. Rather than working to solve the problem, the Biden administration seems set on making it worse. You don't need to look any further than your kitchen to find the latest example.

In 2022, the food-at-home price index, which measures grocery prices, rose 18.6 percent—18.6 percent—reaching heights not seen since the Carter administration. This rise in food prices is directly related to increases in the cost of production faced by our hard-working farmers and ranchers.

These increases are driven by the Biden administration's continued regulatory overreach, failure to empower our domestic energy producers, and failed economic policies. Our producers are facing increased prices for diesel fuel, fertilizer, and for crop protection products, and more. New regulations from this administration threaten to drive up the cost of production even further.

The recently published "Waters of the United States," or WOTUS, is a prime example of regulations that will stifle our agriculture and energy industries and make inflation worse. Instead of this disastrous rule—this WOTUS rule—we should take a States-first approach to protect our land and water that respects private property rights. This comes on top of the administration's misguided approach to domestic energy production, which has caused us to increase our reliance on foreign energy suppliers, which has increased the price of the gallon of gasoline by more than \$1 since the administration took office—more than \$1 a gallon.

We should be empowering our domestic energy producers, including those in my State of North Dakota, to restore our energy independence, reduce our reliance on foreign oil imports, create more jobs here at home, and help reduce prices for consumers. We need to unleash America's vast energy reserves. That is the right solution to lower prices and help provide hard-working families and businesses relief

from the record inflation that has been caused by the policies of the Biden administration.

The Biden administration needs to stop doubling down on failed economic policies. The administration needs to get government out of the way and focus on the fundamentals. That includes increased domestic energy production, securing our border, and taking meaningful action to reduce inflation.

I yield the floor.

S. RES. 21

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the resolution designating January as "National Trafficking and Modern Slavery Prevention Month."

I am proud to introduce this resolution every year to raise awareness about the ongoing atrocities of human trafficking. We must continue to support the ongoing partnerships between governments, nonprofits, service providers, and survivors, who are all working to end human trafficking.

The human trafficking industry generates an estimated \$150 billion in illegal profits a year. And human trafficking impacts 50 million victims around the world. Many of the victims of human trafficking are often difficult to identify and are subjected to manipulation, force, fraud, and abuse. We cannot turn a blind eye to ongoing exploitation and forced labor in our country and throughout the world. We have a responsibility to raise awareness of these horrendous acts, ensure victims understand that they are not alone, and provide legislative solutions to support and protect survivors.

Last Congress, I was able to work with my Senate colleagues to reauthorize the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. By designating January as "National Trafficking and Modern Slavery Prevention Month," we will shine a light on the issue and continue the bipartisan charge to end trafficking and exploitation.

I respectfully ask my colleagues to support this resolution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). The senior Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that we start the vote immediately.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

VOTE ON S. RES. 21

The question is on adoption of S. Res. 21.

Ms. SMITH. Can we have the yeas and nays, please?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Oregon (Mr. WYDEN) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator

from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI) and the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO).

The result was announced—yeas 97, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 4 Leg.]

YEAS—97

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

NOT VOTING—3

Murkowski Rubio Wyden

The resolution (S. Res. 21) was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). Under the previous order, the preamble is agreed to and the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, I take this time to celebrate the success of the Affordable Care Act. We just completed the open enrollment period for 2023. Over 16 million Americans signed up for health coverage under the Affordable Care Act. That is about a 100-percent increase from the first year's enrollment in 2014. In less than 10 years, we have doubled the number of enrollees under the Affordable Care Act.

It has contributed to a substantial reduction in the number of uninsured, which, in and of itself, is an important goal in healthcare. Uninsured individuals have less ability to access quality