

trillion in national debt and almost \$1 trillion a year being spent on interest to pay the bondholders who hold that debt, we know we can't continue down this path. National debt has catapulted from \$3.2 trillion in 1980 to \$9.7 trillion in 2000. Today, it is \$31.7 trillion. Those numbers are so big, I am sure most of us have difficulty grasping them, assuming we could at all—\$31.7 trillion in debt.

While the national debt poses a significant economic risk, it also invites significant security risks. Every day, America is spending more and more money on interest payments—like I said, about \$1 trillion for the bondholders who own that debt. Each dollar that goes toward servicing the debt is a dollar that can't be spent on other priorities, like keeping America safe.

For years, our top defense officials have warned about the risk of the national debt continuing to grow. In 2010, I remember then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen said:

The most significant threat to our national security is our debt.

Since then, our national debt has more than doubled. That trend is not going to change on its own. It requires a change of behavior—behavior by the administration and by Members of the U.S. Congress. We need to act as soon as possible to rein in out-of-control spending and protect America's long-term financial stability and our national security. Future generations are going to have to pay that money back, and we ought to do everything we can to avoid that result, if there are things we can do at least to mitigate it.

So these are the two basic truths that the majority of Americans agree on: A default is unacceptable, and secondly, we need to get our fiscal house in order. Unfortunately, President Biden refuses to engage on either one. This is really unbelievable to me. The President of the United States, the leader of the free world, and he said: Eh, not my problem. How irresponsible, how reckless is that?

From the beginning, President Biden drew outrageous redlines and tried to dictate what a solution would look like. And, actually, it wasn't a solution; it was just a patch. The President ruled out any negotiations over spending reforms and said he expected Congress to raise the debt limit with no conditions attached.

We know that any bank or credit union in America that issues a credit card—that once you have maxed out on your credit limit, they want to know: OK, if you want us to raise that limit, you are going to have to tell us how you are going to pay the money back that you already owe. But President Biden said: No, we want to keep spending, and we want to keep raising the debt limit, but we don't want to do anything about reforming spending or changing the curve when it comes to reining in spending.

These unrealistic declarations by the President don't make him look tough;

they just make him look out of touch. Just because President Biden wants something doesn't mean it will happen.

As the President knows, Democrats no longer control both Chambers of Congress. During the first 2 years, the President could snap his fingers and expect Democrats to advance his agenda without a single Republican vote. And that happened, most recently on two bills which are partisan bills that added \$2.7 trillion to our national debt. And now the President says: It is not my problem.

Well, this isn't a monarchy. We got rid of a King a long time ago. This isn't the Biden empire, and the President's wishes can only count for so much.

The reality of the situation is that any solution to the debt ceiling must be bipartisan and bicameral. It has to be approved by a Republican-led House and a Democrat-led Senate and a Democrat President. Right now, President Biden's clean debt ceiling increase simply has no way to pass.

So we are at an impasse, and there is only one way forward; that is, the President must do what Presidents have always done before this time, and that means come to the negotiating table. That is the only way to avert a debt crisis that both political parties want to avoid.

For months, Republicans have urged President Biden to sit down with Speaker MCCARTHY and hammer a compromise.

Other than a single meeting where they literally touch gloves and then walked away, like two boxers in a ring, the President has been completely absent without leave. He has been AWOL.

He continues to parrot demands that he knows are unreasonable and impractical, and he refuses to acknowledge the reality of the problem.

Well, since President Biden took office a little over 2 years ago, he has been on a spending bender. He pushed Democrats in Congress to pass two massive partisan bills that I mentioned a moment ago, totaling about \$2.7 trillion. These were strictly party-line votes by Democrats, with no Republican support, that added \$2.7 trillion to the debt, and now President Biden said: Not my problem once the debt ceiling has hit.

He stuck taxpayers for a ridiculous set of pet projects, everything from handouts for labor unions to subsidies for wealthy people so they would buy electric vehicles, even though most Americans can't afford one.

President Biden didn't just rely on Democrats to indulge his spending habits; he also ran off with the taxpayers' credit card by himself.

The President single-handedly claimed to be able to spend \$460 billion in an Executive order erasing student loans off the books for tens of millions of borrowers. That case is now pending in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Clearly, he does not have that authority, but he claimed to have it, and now we have a case pending before the Supreme Court to decide that.

So President Biden, in addition to the \$2.7 trillion in partisan spending bills, has no trouble adding to that debt by another \$460 billion. But he doesn't want to negotiate the debt ceiling increase. He doesn't want to talk about how do we get back on a glide-path to more responsible spending habits.

Despite the President's record of spending like there is no tomorrow, he refuses to talk about spending reforms—at least so far. He said he won't even entertain the idea that this is a topic worth discussing with the Speaker of the House.

As I said, that is a completely reckless and irresponsible position to take, and even members of the President's own party are lining up to criticize him. The Senator from Minnesota, Senator KLOBUCHAR, recently said that President Biden should sit down with Speaker MCCARTHY. Senator KLOBUCHAR is right. Congresswoman DEBBIE DINGELL, in the House of Representatives, said that the administration can't keep waiting. Senator MANCHIN, from West Virginia, went so far as to criticize the President's refusal to sit down with Speaker MCCARTHY as a deficiency in leadership.

With a potential default on the horizon, it is time for President Biden to change his tune. He needs to abandon this reckless "my way or the highway" attitude and sit down and do what Presidents have always done, and that is to negotiate a solution.

From the beginning, it was obvious to everybody that a bipartisan compromise was the only path forward. That is the most fundamental tenet of divided government. Nobody can do it by themselves, so you have to work out solutions together.

It is simply unacceptable for any President to stand by with these kinds of outrageous redlines when we are potentially just weeks away from a possible default, considering, especially, the fragility of the economy as it currently exists. And this would make it catastrophic.

So President Biden has wasted months already with his reckless position, and it is time to get moving. I appreciate Speaker MCCARTHY's efforts to break the stalemate and get President Biden to join him at the negotiating table.

I will repeat, in closing, the only way to avoid a debt crisis is through a bipartisan negotiation. Republicans have known that all along. Many Democrats are now acknowledging that as well, and it is time for President Biden to get the message.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON JACOBS NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senate and advise the consent to the Jacobs nomination?

Mr. COONS. 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.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) is necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 74, nays 25, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 96 Ex.]

#### YEAS—74

Baldwin	Graham	Peters
Bennet	Hagerty	Reed
Blackburn	Hassan	Romney
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Rosen
Booker	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Boozman	Hirono	Sanders
Britt	Hoeven	Schatz
Brown	Hyde-Smith	Schumer
Budd	Kaine	Shaheen
Cantwell	Kelly	Sinema
Capito	Kennedy	Smith
Cardin	King	Stabenow
Carper	Klobuchar	Tester
Casey	Lujan	Thune
Cassidy	Manchin	Tillis
Collins	Markley	Tuberville
Coons	Marshall	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warner
Cotton	Merkley	Warnock
Cramer	Moran	Warren
Cruz	Murkowski	Welch
Duckworth	Murphy	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murray	Wyden
Fetterman	Ossoff	Young
Gillibrand	Padilla	

#### NAYS—25

Barrasso	Johnson	Rubio
Braun	Lankford	Schmitt
Cornyn	Lee	Scott (FL)
Crapo	Lummis	Scott (SC)
Daines	McConnell	Sullivan
Ernst	Mullin	Vance
Fischer	Paul	Wicker
Grassley	Ricketts	
Hawley	Risch	

#### NOT VOTING—1

Feinstein

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table, and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

#### RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. ROSEN).

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be recognized for 3 minutes.

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

CONFIRMATION OF JOSHUA DAVID JACOBS

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, last summer this body delivered on a promise to our toxic-exposed veterans. We passed a bill called the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act.

With a historic number of veterans newly eligible for long-overdue benefits, the VA needs a steady, accountable hand to lead VA benefits and its more than 25,000 employees in delivering quality, timely benefits now more than ever.

About an hour and a half ago, we confirmed a person by the name of Josh Jacobs. He is that person who is going to be heading up VA benefits. He is that person with the steady hand. I am glad that this body came together in a bipartisan way to make him the permanent leader of the VBA.

The fact is, having a permanent leader in this role ensures that we can hold the VA accountable to their job, and that is critically important. I can't be prouder of this body to tell you that we have a person who not only understands benefits but has worked in this capacity for the past several months.

With that, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I want to thank you for the recognition.

I would like to speak for 4 minutes, max.

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

VA MEDICINAL CANNABIS RESEARCH ACT OF 2023

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I want to thank the body for this.

So we had a chance to do the right thing here, folks. We did the right thing with Josh Jacobs and veterans' benefits. Now we have the opportunity to pass the Elizabeth Dole Veterans Programs Improvement Act of 2023.

This legislative package includes five veterans bills that were considered and unanimously approved by the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee back in February and delivers on many of our longstanding priorities for our veterans and leading veterans services organizations. I am going to tell you what it does, and then I am going to talk about something specifically.

It expands home- and community-based support for aging and disabled veterans—home- and community-based support.

Among other provisions, it also helps Native Americans and Alaskan Native veterans achieve homeownership by lowering interest rates on VA Native American direct loans and reforming this program so it can work for our veterans—particularly, our Native veterans.

The part that I understand that is controversial is that it directs the VA to explore medical cannabis as an alternative treatment for veterans experiencing chronic pain and symptoms of PTSD.

Why? So that we—but more, importantly, the veterans—have a better understanding of the role medicinal cannabis plays in treating the wounds of war.

The jury is still out on this. This adds a 2-year retrospective study that will take place prior to the VA's beginning clinical trials outlined in this legislation. It grants the Secretary of the VA authority to cancel clinical trials should the VA deem them to be unsafe, based on that retrospective study that I just talked about. It allows the Secretary the authority to cancel trials in the event that it is determined that the trials were exposing participants to excessive risk.

Quite frankly, as I said in my opening, it allows veterans the access to relevant information to make informed decisions about their own health and will shine light on an understudied topic, which is already being used by our veterans nationwide.

So the real question here is, Do I want our veterans to understand the benefits or possibly the nonbenefits of medicinal marijuana or do we want to leave them out in the cold, not understanding what is going on?

The truth is, we all understand the impact opioids have had on this country, and if, in fact, it shows that medical marijuana or marijuana can have impacts that help people in chronic pain, we should know that information so we can pass it along to the veterans. It is as simple as that. The rest of these bills are absolute no-brainers, and I will tell you, I think the cannabis portion of this bill is a no-brainer.

Today, it is time to put political differences aside and do what is right for our veterans.

Look, don't let the haircut fool you—I did not serve in the military. I don't use marijuana. But the truth is, those people who think it works for them, they ought to know, and that is what this bill does.

I would encourage a vote for cloture on this bill. It is a good bill. It is a bill that the veterans service organizations have fought for and want to see happen.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to address the Senate for up to 5 minutes.

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

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, the legislation that is before us, the Veterans Programs Improvement Act, just came out of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. It is S. 326, as amended.

We are here on a motion for cloture, and this bill will be, as amended, a