Here in the Senate, both Republicans and Democrats from Texas, have had the honor of reading that letter every year since 1961, when then-Senator John Tower began that tradition.

So, today, I would like to express my gratitude for these Texas patriots, many of whom would go on to serve in the U.S. Congress, including Sam Houston, whose Senate seat I am honored to occupy, and it is my great honor to read the Travis letter here on the Senate floor.

The letter was addressed ''To the People of Texas and All Americans [Around] the World.''

Fellow citizens & compatriots—I am besieged, by a thousand or more of the Mexicans under Santa Anna—I have sustained a continual Bombardment & cannonade for 24 hours & have not lost a man—The enemy has demanded a surrender at discretion. Otherwise, the garrison are to be put to the sword, if the fort is taken—I have answered the demand with a cannon shot, & our flag still waves proudly from the walls—I shall never surrender or retreat. Then, I call on you in the name of Liberty, of patriotism & everything dear to the American character, to come to our aid, with all dispatch—The enemy is receiving reinforcements daily & will no doubt increase to three or four thousand in four or five days. If this call is neglected, I am determined to sustain myself as long as possible & die like a soldier who never forgets what is due to his own honor & that of his country—Victory or Death.

Signed:

William Barrett Travis, Lt. Col. Comdt.

As I said, in the battle that ensued, all 189 defenders of the Alamo gave their lives, but they did not die in vain. In fact, we Texans might not be around if it weren't for them. We might still be part of Mexico.

The Battle of the Alamo bought precious time for the Texas revolutionaries, allowing General Sam Houston to maneuver his army into position for a decisive victory, as I said, in the Battle of San Jacinto.

For 9 years, the Republic of Texas thrived as a nation. That is the reason we fly our flag at the same height as the U.S. flag, unlike other States. But then in 1845, we were annexed to the United States as the 28th State.

Every single day, I am honored to represent the people of my State here in the U.S. Senate, an opportunity that would not be possible without the sacrifices made by brave men like William Barret Travis 185 years ago.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, I would thank my colleague from Texas for sharing the Texas letter with us again this year. It is always inspiring to hear those words, to remember the sacrifices that were made in Texas. It reminds us all of the sacrifices that are made daily across this country by people who love this country and stand for its unity.

Thank you, Mr. President, to my colleague from Texas.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. President, I come to the floor today because the Senate will likely vote soon on the Biden stimulus bill. I think all of us in this Chamber agree that we want to get relief to the American people. That was our objective when we passed the CARES Act last year, which allocated $2.2 trillion for the relief effort. It was our objective when we passed four other COVID relief bills in 2020—and these brought the total up to $4 trillion. All of these measures were the result of bipartisan cooperation and negotiations—Democrats and Republicans working together.

But right now, the President and congressional Democrats are pushing a completely partisan product through a totally partisan process to promote their progressive agenda. They call it the American Rescue Plan, and the pricetag is $1.9 trillion, more than double what we spent after the financial crisis starting in 2008.

When combined with the five COVID packages we have already enacted, the total cost to the American taxpayers would be close to $6 trillion, more than the GDP of every country other than China and the United States. And as of the end of January, hundreds of billions of dollars from these bills has yet to be spent.

December's relief bill dedicated $284 billion to the Paycheck Protection Program, but only a quarter of those funds had been obligated. That same bill provided $20 billion for Economic Injury Disaster Loans, none of it had been spent by February 1. The same is true of the CARES Act spending for community planning programs, for which hundreds of millions of dollars remain unspent. Over 90 percent of these bills' combined funding for mental health programs was sitting idle as of late January as well.

The White House calls this bill ''emergency legislative package to fund vaccinations, provide immediate, direct relief to families bearing the brunt of the COVID–19 crisis, and supporting struggling communities.''

Each of these things is important, and support for them should absolutely be part of any package we pass. But when you look somewhere other than the White House website to find out what is actually in this bill, you see that many parts of it don't belong in a package that is meant to help us recover from our fight against this virus.

Let us start with what will make the biggest difference for working families: the direct payments to individual Americans. For months, I have supported sending these checks. I went on the record in December to say that people are hurting and that we should help them with more aid in the form of direct payments.

I think these payments are a good idea, but they should be targeted to those who truly need them, not sent to people who haven't been affected in the same way as the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs.

If this once-in-a-century pandemic hasn't put you out of work at one point or another, you have been lucky. But this plan would give you a check even if you have never lost your job and struggled to pay your bills. That is not right.

This administration had time to work with Republicans to make sure those who need help get it. They didn't do that. Instead, people who never lost their job get a check. People who were never furloughed get a check. And financially stable families who earned as much as $200,000 last year—well, they still get a check too.

If so many Americans are hurting, as we all know they are, our only focus should be getting this aid into their hands, not using their insecurity as a chance to pass a bunch of wish list items from this progressive agenda.

The White House wants Congress to spend billions of dollars on things that no COVID aid bill should be addressing. Many other Senators have expressed similar concerns. We believe that every cent of any COVID relief bill needs to go toward recovery from the effects of COVID on families and on communities.

The new administration has a chance to show that they really are interested in ''bipartisanship'' and ''unity''—two words President Biden uses just about every day. They could prove that today by reaching out to Republicans in good faith, but, so far, any effort by the administration to do so has only been to provide an appearance of working together, not to make any actual progress on any kind of bipartisan product. Instead, they are focusing on filling this package with progressive priorities.

So let's take a look at some of the items on that list: giving $30 billion to public transit authorities, even though President Biden only asked for $20 billion and several major Agencies have said the December relief bill would get them through at least until summer; spending $50 million on family planning programs that wouldn't have Hyde protections, meaning that our tax dollars would pay for elective abortions; allowing Planned Parenthood to receive the small business funding from the Paycheck Protection Program; dedicating another $50 million to the troubling vague goal of ''combating the climate crisis''; sending $12 billion overseas in aid—this does not belong in a domestic COVID response bill—and spending over $100 million on a subway system near Speaker PELOSI's district in the Bay area. I will leave it up to my Democratic colleagues to explain how expanding a subway in Northern California would help all Americans ''build back better'' in this pandemic. So far, they are silent.

This is supposed to be an emergency rescue plan for the Americans who have been hit hardest by COVID, but, instead, the Biden stimulus plan doesn't make any of the tough decisions we need to make, and it uses Americans' hard-earned tax dollars as a blank check.

This proposal also pays lipservice to the importance of getting students back into the classroom, while asking this body to vote for things that would do exactly the opposite.

Even though almost $70 billion of the funds dedicated to schools in December's relief bill still hasn't been spent, this American Rescue Plan would give them nearly $170 billion more. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle say this money is necessary for a majority of K–8 schools to safely reopen in the President's first 100 days, but their bill would reserve 95 percent of that new money for the years 2022 to 2028. How does that help families today who want their kids to get back to school? They want them back in school now; so how does it help?

This bill goes even further than that. It would treat schools that choose to open and schools that remained closed the same way, which does nothing to incentivize them to get their kids back in classrooms.

This plan would also give $350 billion to States, cities, and localities. A big chunk of that money will be used to bail out States like New York and California, which have kept people away from their jobs and their children out of schools for months on end.

Even worse, this bill tallies States' and localities' level of funding based on raw unemployment numbers, not their unemployment rate. That would punish both red and blue States that have handled this pandemic well. It leaves behind States like mine—like Nebraska—which has the lowest unemployment rate in the country because we have succeeded in balancing safety and reopening where other States have failed. It would also hurt Minnesota, Vermont, and New Hampshire—three blue States that have kept their unemployment numbers low.

When you look under the hood, this bill is more about passing that partisan wish list than getting the United States through the worst public health crisis that we have faced in over a century.

At best, the name ''American Rescue Plan'' is misleading. At worst, it is deceptive.

I stand ready to work with the administration and my Democratic colleagues in Congress to address these issues and to give Americans the help they need in a targeted, reasonable, and productive way. We did that with the CARES Act, and we could do it again if our colleagues on the other side are willing.

That is the way the Senate is supposed to work—in a bipartisan way. It is how we reach consensus and deliver the policies that the American people need and that the American people deserve.

I know I share the sentiments of many of my colleagues when I say that I am disappointed in how this process has been conducted. Without an effort to compromise and to make major changes in the stimulus package, I will be voting no.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise today to commemorate Texas Independence Day. One hundred and eighty-five years ago today, on March 2, 1836, the Republic of Texas declared our independence from the nation of Mexico. Fifty-nine delegates who adopted the Texas Declaration of Independence on that day gathered at Washington-on-the-Brazos. The delegates adopted a declaration, modeled in significant parts after the Declaration of Independence of the United States.

The declaration decried the arbitrary acts of oppression and tyranny from the Mexican Government under the dictator General Santa Anna. In particular, it noted that that government had ''ceased to protect the lives, liberty, and property of the people from whom its legitimate powers are derived.'' And the Texans signing that declaration sought to protect their rights of free speech, their rights to keep and bear arms, and their rights of freedom of religion.

Signing that declaration commenced the Texas Revolution, our battle for independence, where we won independence from the nation of Mexico. And for 9 years, the State of Texas became the Republic of Texas, an independent nation. That, of course, ceased in 1845, when we joined the United States. And today, we celebrate that spirit of independence that is still found throughout all 29 million Texans.

NOMINATION OF GINA MARIE RAIMONDO

Mr. President, I rise today to express concern over President Biden's nomination of Governor Gina Raimondo to lead the Department of Commerce.

We are a year into a deadly pandemic that originated in Wuhan, China. The Chinese Communist Party censored and disappeared doctors and journalists who were trying to tell the truth about how the coronavirus was spreading, and the Chinese Communist Party lied to the world about the nature of the virus. Over 2½ million people worldwide have died, including over a half million Americans.

The Chinese Communist Party's lies and censorship and propaganda didn't stop with the pandemic. They pervade everything the Chinese Communist Party does. Many of us are increasingly concerned that China is gaining access to American secrets using nontraditional all-of-government—or even all-of-nation—approaches to espionage against the United States and our allies. That includes using companies like Tencent and Huawei, which masquerade as telecom companies when they are, in fact, government espionage operations. This is deeply troubling and dangerous.

China is, in my judgment, the greatest long-term geopolitical threat to the United States for the next century. Presidents in both parties have believed for decades that the United States could somehow turn China from a foe to a friend through trade and diplomacy or that allowing China into rules-based institutions would turn China into a rules-based country. Instead, sadly, the opposite has happened.

The United States, of course, can't sever all commerce with one of the biggest economies in the planet, but we must recognize China for the threat it poses to our national security. To counter the threat that China poses, we should do four things:

No. 1, we should protect ourselves from Chinese espionage and interference.

No. 2, we should insulate the supply lines of our critical resources from China, including by bringing them back to the United States.

No. 3, we should insulate all commerce from enabling the Chinese Communist Party's human rights abuses, including their systematic pattern of torture, murder, and genocide.

And, No. 4, we should vigorously compete to secure our interests.

On the first point, one important thing the Department of Commerce does is maintain an Entity List, which is a list of foreign parties and companies that engage in activities contrary to American national security interests. When a foreign company is put on the Entity List, they are barred from acquiring American technology.

In 2019, I led an effort to add to the list of companies, and in 2019 and in 2020, the Trump administration added several Chinese technologies companies to the Entity List.

When Governor Raimondo came before the Commerce Committee in January, I asked her if she would keep those Chinese technologies companies on the Entity List. She refused to make that commitment. In fact, she wouldn't even commit to keeping Huawei on the Entity List, which is unabashedly an espionage agency of the Chinese Communist Party.

In questions for the record, I gave Governor Raimondo a second chance to clearly and explicitly answer these questions, and yet she still refused.

Similarly, the Governor provided vague nonanswers or no answers at all in response to questions for the record on her ethics problems and her conflicts of interest as Governor.

As my colleagues know, nominees will never be more engaged, more transparent, or more forthcoming than during their confirmation process. That Governor Raimondo has refused to be any one of these speaks volumes to how she would act if confirmed as Secretary.

The fact is that there has been a rush to embrace the worst elements of the Chinese Communist Party in the Biden administration, and that includes Governor Raimondo. That is why I placed a hold on her confirmation, and that is why I will be voting not to confirm her to lead the Department of Commerce.