bias, bigotry, and prejudice. Now, hate-motivated violence, as Attorney Garland said at his confirmation hearing, ''tear[s] at the fabric of our society . . . make[s] our citizens worried about walking [on] the streets and exercising even the most normal rights.''

And he is absolutely correct. It tears at our society. It degrades our trust in each other and in the fairness of America and the survivability of values and rights that are central to our democracy.

The increase in violence against Asian Americans must end, and we all know it. We all say it, but we must do it. In Congress, we must do everything in our power to provide law enforcement and prosecutors with the resources and the tools they need to overcome it, to successfully fight it, which they can do. And they need the will and determination to wield the tools and resources that we give them because they have to not only investigate, as they will this gunman, but also to effectively prosecute and assure just punishment.

We don't know for sure the motivation. We have evidence. And we can't say for sure how many hate crimes there have been against Asian Americans or others in our great country, but we have a pretty good idea where it all came from.

The rise in anti-Asian-American violence started with the previous administration, who failed to address and manage the COVID–19 pandemic, and rather than listen to the scientists and work to stop its spread, it sought to scapegoat a part of our country. It sought to scapegoat Asian Americans with xenophobic and hate-filled rhetoric.

Words have consequences. We all say it. We all know it. And we must denounce the words that spur and spew hatred and cause or contribute to hate crimes. Hate crimes are a growing scourge. The numbers are surging, whether it is against Asian Americans, Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans, Black Americans. When it is against Americans, it is against America. Words do have consequences.

Stop AAPI Hate, which tracks violence and harassment against the AAPI community, Asian Americans, received more than 1,100 reports of COVID-related harassment, discrimination, and assault in its first two operational weeks last March. And now it has recorded more than 3,800 incidents since the start of the pandemic—3,800 incidents of harassment, discrimination, and sometimes physical assault—spurred and encouraged and condoned by public officials who used that hate-filled rhetoric to cover their own failures in dealing with the pandemic.

As the investigators and prosecutors go forward, we will learn more, and we need to let them do their jobs. But that doesn't mean we should remain silent, nor does it give us an excuse to be inert. We need to denounce that kind of rhetoric. We need to take action.

I have proposed a measure called the NO HATE Act, which would provide more training for investigators and more resources for hotlines because these hate crimes are typically and repeatedly unreported, and it would provide more incentives for reporting and new penalties—or encourage the imposition of penalties—that truly fit the crime.

Hate crimes are corrosive to our social fabric. They corrupt the pillars of our society, and their effect is unmistakable.

They traumatize and terrorize the communities that are their targets—in this case, Asian Americans, who have become more and more fearful as these incidents have multiplied. We all have a part to do in stopping this scourge. And we know that it is rampant, in part, because of the White supremacists and domestic terrorism and violent extremism that showed its ugly face in this Chamber earlier this year. It showed its brutal, cruel force in this building.

It is the same virus and cancer that is metastasizing in this country today. And its visible forms are the assaults, harassment, and discrimination that may well have been reflected in those murders yesterday.

I hope the NO HATE Act passes, but it won't be for a while. I hope we can take other action, but it will take time. And in the meantime, we can all take it as a moral imperative as our duty to denounce—not condoned by our silence—these groups and their extremist ideologies in White supremacists that perpetuate and expand the virus and cancer of hate crimes and hatred. Hate speech—fighting words—incitement in our society.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Now, a bright spot for America today is the confirmation, which we hope will happen in the next 24 hours, of the first Latino Secretary of Health and Human Services in America, the first. He was the first in his working-class family to go to college. He broke barriers throughout his career.

Xavier Becerra, presently the attorney general of California, will be a leader of toughness, bravery, and vision at the Department of Health and Human Services.

I stand here as a former attorney general, actually, for 20 years. I know well how much of that job is spent on healthcare policy, and I know also the management skills it takes to achieve real concrete results.

Attorney General Becerra is deeply qualified because of his work as State attorney general, but he also enjoys a wealth of other experience, both personal and professional, that make him exactly the right person at this moment for that job. He knows the importance of healthcare—equitable healthcare, reducing the disparities in healthcare in our country that afflict us now.

We have been in a healthcare crisis for more than a year, the deepest, most painful healthcare crisis in our lives and maybe for a full century, a time of heartbreak and hardship, when a deadly, insidious virus has threatened economic upheaval and disaster. It is a pandemic that has left no family untouched, as all of us in this Chamber know, and no community unscathed.

We have lost more than half a million of our fellow citizens and people to COVID–19, including 7,800-plus in Connecticut. While there is light at the end of the tunnel, each day brings a new loss. And we don't know how long that tunnel may be.

The Biden administration has been laser-focused on ending this pandemic since day one. Every day, more and more Americans are receiving the vaccine. Every day, more and more Americans are beginning to see the big, bold benefits of the American Rescue Plan that President Biden signed last week, and every day we are seeing strong leadership from the Biden administration in addressing this deep crisis.

While there is hope at this moment, there are immense healthcare challenges still to be overcome, from increasing healthcare affordability and reducing the uninsured rate to lowering drug costs, to fighting back against healthcare disparities and protecting reproductive rights, and, I would repeat, lowering prescription drug costs. Job No. 1 for America, lowering prescription drug costs. Job No. 2, lowering prescription drug costs. We need to reduce the prices of medicine that Americans need every day, aside from the pandemic, every day. Prescription drug prices plague them, cause them worry, force them to make tough choices between eating and using the medicine, paying their rent, and buying the drugs they need to survive.

Attorney General Becerra served as deputy attorney general in California and later as a member of the State assembly before he went to the House of Representatives, here in the Capitol, for more than two decades. As a Congressman—and I think this point is really important—then-Representative Xavier Becerra fought to pass the Affordable Care Act, and then he fought to defend it against the Trump administration.

As California's attorney general, he was a warrior in fighting to preserve the ACA, and he will continue to fight for the men and women who depend on the ACA. And more and more of them, fortunately, are taking advantage of it because of the American Rescue Plan.

He is also a leader in taking on Big Tobacco. I sued the tobacco companies, helped to lead a multi-State attorney general group, and I know it takes courage to stand up and speak out and act against Big Tobacco. And he has done more. He has taken that fight to a new frontier. He is committed to protecting our children from the scourge of flavored tobacco and the insidious products—often they are flavored too—that are sold by vaping giants, which now include some tobacco companies.

Attorney General Becerra is a leader in protecting reproductive rights. He is a leader in expanding mental healthcare services. He is a leader in the fight against the opioid epidemic. He is a leader for LGBTQ health and for ending the disparities.

We are in a racial justice movement now, a racial justice movement that is seeking to end those deep disparities, causing twice as many people in communities of color to die during the pandemic and only half as many now to have the vaccine so far because we have lived through 4 years of dishonesty and disregard for science and 4 years of attacks on our healthcare system, particularly for the underserved.

That is the challenge, among others, that Attorney General Becerra will confront. He will be vigorous, brave, and tough, and he will work to lower the cost of prescription drugs. He will take on those interests that may be against the healthcare goals and purposes of the American people. And we need him now more than ever in this critical position. I urge my colleagues to vote for him tomorrow when we have the chance to do so.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. OSSOFF). The Senator from California.

GEORGIA SHOOTINGS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I want to begin by joining with so many of our colleagues and leaders around the country expressing our condolences to the victims of the senseless shootings in Atlanta yesterday, in sharing our thoughts and prayers to their families and friends. Our heart goes out to the greater community, and, of course, we stand here to not only try to understand better what happened, how it happened, but do the work necessary to try to ensure that it doesn't happen again—not in Atlanta, not anywhere in the United States of America.

NOMINATION OF XAVIER BECERRA

Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of the nomination of my friend California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to serve as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

As we all know, as we all feel, our Nation is going through one of the toughest health crises in our history. The COVID–19 pandemic has taken an incredible toll on our country. Every State has been impacted. Every community has suffered, especially working-class communities and communities of color, like the very neighborhoods that Attorney General Becerra and I grew up in. These communities are hurting and people are dying at alarming rates, and they desperately need someone who knows these communities to their core.

Throughout his career, Xavier Becerra has always fought to improve the lives of his constituents. As the first Latino attorney general of California, he made it his mission to tackle the structural inequalities in our healthcare system. As has been referenced already, Attorney General Becerra was the leading force behind the lawsuit to protect the Affordable Care Act. Yes, he had the audacity to maintain protections for people with preexisting conditions and for those suffering from a mental illness. Over the course of this past year, he has also fought to protect frontline healthcare workers from further exposure to COVID–19.

Xavier Becerra's parents emigrated from Mexico, just like my parents did, with a dream of building a better life for themselves and their family. Just a few days ago, I spoke in this Chamber about my family's history and journey in this country. A hard-working short-order cook and housekeeper raised the son who now serves in the U.S. Senate. The same is true for Xavier Becerra's family. He, the son of a construction and clerical worker, is on the verge of becoming the most important health official in our Nation. That is the American dream.

But, unfortunately, tragically, over half a million Americans have had their dream cut short by COVID–19, over half a million lives lost and millions more lives upended by this pandemic. We need to act with urgency to end this crisis—urgency.

But as I rise today to address this Chamber, urgency is severely lacking. While millions of Americans continue to struggle, our Republican colleagues are dragging things out, playing politics with the confirmation of Attorney General Becerra, one of the most qualified nominees to lead the Department of Health and Human Services that this Chamber has ever considered. They have distorted his record.

Let me point out that many Members of this Senate have worked alongside Xavier Becerra here in Congress for decades. Republicans and Democrats know Xavier Becerra is both a thoughtful leader and someone who is always willing to listen to both sides of an argument. He built an outstanding reputation in the House, both as a legislator and as a colleague.

As attorney general of California, overseeing the largest department of justice in the Nation, second only to the U.S. Department of Justice, Xavier showed no fear in working across the aisle. In fact, he partnered with Republican attorneys general to increase access to lifesaving drugs to treat COVID–19. He worked across the aisle to protect drug discounts for health centers.

I can't help but point out the obvious. In fact, I am prepared to make this abundantly clear to the American people. The cynical delays and political games that we see being played are not actually about Mr. Becerra's qualifications. He is just as qualified as any of his predecessors. Sadly, Xavier Becerra is being held to a different standard—a different standard than other nominees this Chamber has supported and confirmed over the last 4 years, including our most recent Health and Human Services Secretary.

Let me also say this. As some of the first Latinos in our respective positions, both Xavier and I are not unfamiliar with being held to a different standard. It is a different standard today that is so stark that our colleagues are willing to delay his confirmation through the night. Yes, in the middle of a global health pandemic, Republicans are holding up the nominee for Secretary of Health and Human Services. They are holding up the first Latino nominee to head this critical agency during a pandemic that has disproportionately devastated the Latino community.

It is time to let Xavier Becerra get to work. I urge my colleagues to end the delay on Xavier Becerra's confirmation for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Thank you, Mr. President.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and 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.

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

VOTE EXPLANATION

● Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on confirmation: Katherine C. Tai, of the District of Columbia, to be United States Trade Representative, Rollcall vote 123.

Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for votes on March 17, 2021, so I could return to Hawaii to tend to a family matter.

On March 17, had I been present, I would have voted yea on cloture motion: Xavier Becerra, of California, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services, Rollcall vote 124.●

(At the request of Mr. SCHUMER, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

CONFIRMATION OF KATHERINE C. TAI

● Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, I rise to support the nomination of Katherine Tai to serve as the next United States Trade Representative. When confirmed, Ms. Tai will be the first woman of color and first Asian American to lead the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative.

Katherine Tai's story is America's story. Her parents came to the United