threatens Social Security payments for tens of millions of Americans, it threatens healthcare coverage for tens of millions more, and it could slash benefits for our Nation's veterans. Who could be proud of that vote?

On a national global scale, default would be, in the words of Mark Zandi, Moody's chief economist, ''financial Armageddon.'' It would send markets into free fall and threaten America's status as the world's reserve currency. Imagine that. You say to the seniors: Well, maybe/maybe not on your Social Security payments. And, incidentally, the stocks and the ETFs and the mutual funds and the investments you had for your retirement—hang on tight; they are about to take a huge hit, a hit that is totally avoidable.

Back in 2011, when House Republicans initially refused to raise the debt limit, America's credit rating was downgraded. So what? Interest rates went up, so we are paying more money in interest instead of paying it for things America values—healthcare, education, infrastructure.

Some economists believe that episode hurt consumer confidence and hobbled our economy in the great recession. It also stuck taxpayers with billions of dollars in increased borrowing costs. Think about how fragile America's economy is at this very moment. We are still recovering from a once-in-a-century public health crisis and the worst economic crisis in 75 years. The last thing we need is a self-inflicted crisis that is motivated by partisanship.

Mr. President, right now, our economy has to be our highest priority. We need to come together and get the government funded. We also have an obligation to provide financial relief to Americans who have been hit by the environmental disasters. My State escaped that, but tomorrow that may not be the case. You never know with these extreme weather events. Hurricane Ida was an eye-opener for many parts of this country. People are suffering. Disaster aid for these people is essential.

We need to also help resettle the refugees from Afghanistan. They risked their lives for Americans; we should make a home for them here in the United States.

We also want to make sure that we support our military in every way possible.

Instead of bickering and political brinksmanship, Congress needs to rise to this moment of crisis. The American people sent us to Washington not to manufacture crises but to prevent them. That is exactly why Senate Democrats are moving ahead to put President Biden's Build Back Better plan in place. Pay our debts, invest in a prosperous future—that is our plan. We would love to have Republican support for it. We have a once-in-a-century opportunity to consider working families, middle-income families, struggling families, not the wealthy.

The Build Back Better plan will grow our economy for generations to come. If fully enacted, it will create a future for every parent to take off work to care for a newborn child. Every high school grad can receive a college education and set their sights on a good-paying job. And every senior citizen can afford prescription drugs they need without dipping into their saving. These investments will make America healthier, happier, stronger, and more prosperous.

And unlike President Trump's giveaway to the rich, President Biden's Build Back Better plan is a prudent investment in our Nation's financial future. We are going to pay for it; that is the Senate Democrats' intent. It will not be added to the deficit.

I look forward to discussing that plan in detail in the weeks to come.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that Senators THUNE, HEINRICH, and LUJÁN be able to complete their remarks prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there any objection?

Seeing none, without objection, it is so ordered.

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

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, there has been a good discussion already on the floor this morning—I was listening to my colleague, the Democratic whip—discussing the upcoming challenges that we face this fall. We have got to fund the government, we are facing the debt limit issue, and of course the Democrats' reckless tax-and-spending-spree proposal that we will have to deal with at some point too.

The issue that has been raised is, why wouldn't Republicans want to help raise the debt limit? And I think the answer is very simple. The Democrats control the entire government here. They control the House, they control the Senate, they control the White House, and they have a procedure here in the Senate that enables them to raise the debt limit with 51 votes. They don't need a single Republican vote to raise the debt limit.

They keep arguing that, well, in the past, there have been, you know, previous times when the debt limit has been a bipartisan issue. And in most cases, those were times, of course, when there was divided government and there was actually negotiation over these issues, which there isn't right now. I mean, this tax-and-spending spree being proposed by the Democrats is the largest expansion of government as a percentage of GDP, I believe, in history—certainly going back to the 1930s.

But there is no question that this is a blowout spending bill that the Democrats have decided to do all on their own. Not a single Republican will vote for it.

And so the debt increase that would accommodate all of that additional spending—the massive amount of spending, in some cases financed with tax increases—but that is another issue, and I am going to get to that in just a minute. But the amount of debt that would be added as a result of the $3.5 trillion the Democrats want to spend, on top of the $2 trillion that they spent earlier this year in February—again, done all on Democrat vote; no Republicans participated in that—is a very, very different scenario than when there have been in the past attempts to actually work in a bipartisan way.

My colleague from Illinois mentioned the fact of the increase in the debt under the previous administration—what the level had been, somewhere on the order of 6 or $6.5 trillion—and I have to remind people that 4.5 trillion of that was negotiated in response to the crisis of the pandemic. And that was a negotiation between Republicans and Democrats, where both sides sat together and said, ''We have to do something; we have to react in a quick way, a bold way, to what is happening around the country,'' and created programs like the PPP program, which helped a lot of small businesses survive, helped with payments to healthcare providers for PPE and other costs to get them through this, money for vaccines, money for people who had been unemployed as a consequence of the pandemic. These were all costs associated with the pandemic that were negotiated in a bipartisan way, Republicans and Democrats working together.

What we have in front of us right now is the Democrats proposing the biggest expansion of government probably in the history of this country. And if you look at what they are calling $3.5 trillion, a lot of outside groups, like the Committee for Responsible Federal Government, say it is $5.5 trillion. Either way, it is a massive amount of spending, all of which would dramatically increase the size of the government in this country and people's dependence upon government. I call it the ''free everything'' bill because, essentially, that is what it is.

What I would simply suggest to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle is that if you want to spend $3.5 trillion or $5.5 trillion—whatever that number is—and you want to do it with 51 votes, without any discussion or negotiation or attempt to even reach out to Republicans on this, then, you ought to do it.

Republicans were in the room. They negotiated a bipartisan infrastructure bill, $1.2 trillion, that passed here with 69 votes, and would pass overwhelmingly, I think, in the House, unless coupled with this massive spending bill, and then it would be signed into law by

the President. That is an example of what can happen when you sit down and negotiate.

On this other $3.5 trillion they have decided to do, they have decided to expand massively the size of the Federal Government, and to do that, they are going to add to the Federal debt. And it seems pretty straightforward, I think—and I think most Americans would understand—that if you control the entire government—the House, the Senate, and the White House—and it is all your spending that is going to be necessary or that is going to be responsible for requiring an increase in the debt limit, then you ought to do it with Democrat votes. I think that is a perfect way of looking at this that would fit with the views of where most Americans are, most of whom, I believe, don't want to see their Federal Government going another $3.5 trillion into debt or massively expanding the size of the Federal Government at a time when inflation is already out of control.

I want to speak to that because inflation is rapidly becoming a serious problem. Currently, inflation is near a 13-year high. It has outstripped wage growth for many Americans, including the lowest earning workers. In other words, the rise in the price of everything from goods to groceries has resulted in a de facto pay cut for American workers.

So why are we experiencing this level of inflation? Well, as I mentioned, one reason is Democrats' decision in March to flood the economy with unnecessary government spending. President Biden and congressional Democrats took office mere weeks after Congress had approved a fifth—fifth—bipartisan COVID relief bill. And it was abundantly clear that we were not in immediate need of trillions more in government spending. But that didn't matter. It didn't matter to Democrats.

Now that they were in control of Congress and the White House, they wanted to take advantage of the COVID crisis. So in the name of COVID relief, they pushed through a massive partisan piece of legislation, filled with unnecessary spending and handouts to Democrat interests groups. Schools, which had barely touched the tens of billions they had already been given, got billions more. State governments, the majority of which did not need more government assistance, got access to a staggering—staggering—$350 billion slush fund. Labor unions were made eligible for loans that were designed to rescue Main Street small businesses. And I could go on.

At the time, Republicans warned about the bill's level of spending. And we weren't alone. More than one liberal economist warned that pouring that much money into the economy at that time could result in inflation. And 6 months later, here we are. Inflation is near a 13-year high, and Americans are, rightly, worrying about whether their paychecks will stretch to cover the higher prices that they are facing.

In the face of that fact, and considering the substantial amounts of money we had to borrow to meet the COVID crisis, you might think that Democrats would be taking a moment to reflect and perhaps think about ways to rein in excessive spending. But you would be wrong. In fact, Democrats have decided to double down on their failed strategy and pass another massive government spending bill, even bigger—even bigger—than the last one that I just mentioned. That is right. Now Democrats are putting together a $3.5 trillion spending bill to follow up on their $1.9 trillion spending bill from this last March.

And to put those numbers in perspective, the entire Federal budget for 2019 was less than $4.5 trillion. Dumping that much money into the economy is pretty much guaranteed to continue to fuel the kind of inflation that Americans are currently experiencing. In fact, there is a good chance it could make things much worse.

And that is not the only way Americans are likely to suffer as a result of Democrats' proposed tax-and-spending spree. Americans are going to also feel the pain of the $2 trillion in tax hikes the Democrats are contemplating.

It always fascinates me how Democrats think that you can just pass tax increases without consequences. To hear Democrats talk, you would think that you can impose $2 trillion in tax hikes and everything will just keep going along unchanged. But, of course, we all know that is not the way it works. There is no such thing as consequence-free taxation.

Raise taxes by any meaningful amount, and people are most likely going to change their behavior. A small business, for example, may think twice about hiring an additional worker if it is facing a tax hike. A larger business may decide not to open that new plant it has been planning or it may institute a hiring freeze or it may decide that it needs to encourage some early retirements.

Democrats' $2 trillion tax hike would be the largest tax hike in decades. Democrats are proposing to raise taxes on large businesses, on small businesses, on investment, and on retirement savings. And the list goes on. And every one of those taxes will have consequences for ordinary Americans.

Democrats are proposing a corporate tax rate higher than the one imposed by communist China. That is going to put American businesses at a disadvantage on the global stage. And when American businesses suffer, American workers suffer.

Democrats always seem to forget that most Americans are employed by businesses, and that, as a result, when you raise taxes on businesses, ordinary Americans tend to feel the consequences.

If Democrats succeed in passing their $2 trillion tax hike, it is going to have serious economic consequences for regular Americans—consequences like fewer jobs and opportunities; slower or nonexistent wage growth, especially with higher inflation eroding household spending power; and fewer benefits.

Americans can also expect to see higher utility bills, thanks to Democrats' proposed tax hikes on large businesses and on energy development.

I have been talking for a while now, and I haven't even gotten to the spending side of the Democrats' tax-and-spending spree. Frankly, it is difficult to know even where to start. This proposal reads more like a spending encyclopedia. There is spending on pretty much every topic from A to Z.

There are the big-ticket items, of course, the supposedly free stuff that Democrats are emphasizing, such as free community college and free pre-K. Then, there are the items Democrats aren't advertising as much, like the $200 million—yes, $200 million—for a park in House Speaker PELOSI's district that features a luxury accommodation and a golf course. Given that, I am not sure why this park needs $200 million from the Federal Government, but I guess being Speaker ''hath its privileges.''

In fact, one Democrat Representative admitted as much, noting that it seems that, and I quote, ''Speaker PELOSI gets maybe a little bit more . . . on some of these bills,'' but then went on to argue that she deserves it for being Speaker.

But moving on, there is a nearly $80 billion increase in funding for the IRS—yeah, $80 billion. That is enough to nearly double the Agency's size. But I guess you have to have a lot of new agents to collect all of those new tax hikes.

Then there are new and expanded subsidies for electric vehicles. Under the Democrats' proposal, a couple could be making well over half a million dollars yet still claim more than $12,000 from the Federal Government to purchase an electric car.

There is a Civilian Climate Corps—several of them, in fact—at various government Agencies, $20 billion for a National Climate Bank to subsidize Democrats' pet environmental projects, and—I am not making this up—a new tax break to subsidize membership dues to unions—plus much, much more.

And, of course, with all that government spending comes new government regulations—a long, long, long list of them.

The consequences of the Democrats' tax-and-spending spree could be devastating—for our economy and for American families. And, unfortunately, Democrats have the ability to force this legislation through on a solely partisan basis.

I know there are at least some Members of the Democrat Party here in Congress who are uncomfortable with the stratospheric levels of spending the Democrats are proposing, and I hope that their cooler heads will prevail.

Meanwhile, I and every Republican will do everything we can to protect

Americans from Democrats' reckless tax-and-spending legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

NOMINATION OF MARGARET IRENE STRICKLAND

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I am quite pleased that the Senate will soon be voting on the confirmation of Margaret Strickland, President Biden's nominee to be a district court judge for the District of New Mexico.

Ms. Strickland was born and raised in the southwest border region where this district court seat presides. She attended New Mexico State University and the University of Texas at El Paso, before attending law school at New York University.

Ms. Strickland returned to the Southwest after law school and started her career with the Las Cruces Office of the New Mexico Public Defender, representing clients in the juvenile drug court and in felony defense work.

In 2011, Ms. Strickland formed her own law firm, continuing her public service work representing indigent defendants in Federal court. Ms. Strickland has litigated both criminal and civil cases, including a significant number in the Federal district court located in Las Cruces, NM. She has also appeared before the New Mexico Court of Appeals, the New Mexico Supreme Court, and the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals, and filed before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Ms. Strickland served on the board of the New Mexico Criminal Defense Lawyers for over a decade, including as its president. In 2018, the Federal District of New Mexico appointed her to represent all Criminal Justice Act lawyers as a panel representative.

Ms. Strickland has also done significant volunteer work with programs that reduce the rate of euthanasia for companion animals. She and her husband Greg foster dogs and puppies set for euthanasia so the dogs can be placed in a home.

If confirmed, Ms. Strickland will be faced with one of the biggest Federal dockets in the country and inheriting a very heavy backlog of cases.

I am, however, confident that her experience and her incredible work ethic will best position her to immediately get to work.

Ms. Strickland is a highly qualified nominee with the right experience, the right temperament, and the right disposition to be a fairminded district court judge. The ABA agrees, giving her a majority ''well qualified'' rating.

She has spent her entire professional career working in the community in which she will sit. She knows intimately the impact that the legal system has on everyday Americans, and she understands that serving as a judge is very different from serving as an advocate.

She is ready and prepared to shift from zealously and effectively representing clients to faithfully applying the law to the facts of a specific case.

Both before and after her nomination was announced, New Mexicans called my office in favor of Ms. Strickland. I heard from judges, from prosecutors, from defense attorneys, and everyday New Mexicans. All of them called to say how much they believe in Ms. Strickland. Like those New Mexicans who called into my office, I believe Ms. Strickland belongs on the bench, and I am ready to cast my vote and help her get there.

I enthusiastically support Ms. Strickland's nomination for district court judge for the District of New Mexico, and I hope that all of my colleagues will join me in confirming this highly qualified nominee.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 231, Margaret Irene Strickland, of New Mexico, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Mexico.

Charles E. Schumer, Martin Heinrich, Alex Padilla, Margaret Wood Hassan, Raphael Warnock, Ben Ray Luján, Gary C. Peters, Elizabeth Warren, Christopher Murphy, Tammy Duckworth, Patrick J. Leahy, Sheldon Whitehouse, Michael F. Bennet, Tim Kaine, Tammy Baldwin, Cory A. Booker, Sherrod Brown.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Margaret Irene Strickland, of New Mexico, to be United States District Judge for the District of New Mexico, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

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

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 46, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 367 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Baldwin	Hassan	Murray
Bennet	Heinrich	Ossoff
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Padilla
Booker	Hirono	Peters
Brown	Kaine	Reed
Cantwell	Kelly	Rosen
Cardin	King	Sanders
Carper	Klobuchar	Schatz
Casey	Leahy	Schumer
Collins	Luján	Shaheen
Coons	Manchin	Sinema
Cortez Masto	Markey	Smith
Duckworth	Menendez	Stabenow
Durbin	Merkley	Tester
Gillibrand	Murkowski	Van Hollen
Graham	Murphy	Warner
		Warnock
		Warren
		Whitehouse
		Wyden

NAYS—46

Barrasso	Grassley	Risch
Blackburn	Hagerty	Romney
Blunt	Hawley	Rubio
Boozman	Hoeven	Sasse
Braun	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Burr	Inhofe	Scott (SC)
Capito	Johnson	Shelby
Cassidy	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lankford	Thune
Cotton	Lee	Tillis
Cramer	Lummis	Toomey
Crapo	Marshall	Tuberville
Cruz	McConnell	Wicker
Daines	Moran	Young
Ernst	Paul	
Fischer	Portman	

NOT VOTING—2

Feinstein Rounds

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The yeas are 52, the nays are 46.

The motion is agreed to.

RECESS

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

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:36 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. SINEMA).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

HONORING STAFF SERGEANT RYAN KNAUSS

Mr. HAGERTY. Madam President, I have come to the floor of the Senate today on behalf of myself and the senior Senator from Tennessee, MARSHA BLACKBURN, to honor the life and legacy of a heroic Tennessean, U.S. Army SSG Ryan Knauss, who was killed in a terrorist attack while serving the country that he loves so in Afghanistan on August 26, 2021.

Staff Sergeant Knauss served with the Army's 9th Psychological Operations Battalion, 8th Psychological Operations Group at Fort Bragg. He was from Corryton, TN—a small, rural community where love of country and volunteerism runs deep.

Corryton is known for being the hometown of country music star Kenny Chesney, and now it will be known forever as the home of our hero, SSG Ryan Knauss.

Ryan was 23 years old when he laid his life down for his Nation. I have spoken with Staff Sergeant Knauss's widow Alena and his father Greg. Through our conversations, I got to know a little bit more about Staff Sergeant Knauss. And I am here today to share with you all and with the American people just who Staff Sergeant Knauss was.

He was a devoted husband. Ryan met Alena when they were in high school working at a local pizza parlor. I sensed her deep love for Ryan when we spoke, and I am certain that Alena feels blessed to have had the opportunity to be loved by someone like Ryan.