

But let's make this crystal clear: None of this is the fault of our military. Our military leaders, the ones with real experience on the ground, advised the same thing that I did, and that is, leave a small force in Afghanistan. Now, this would have supported the Afghan military, prevented the Taliban's takeover, kept the pressure on the terrorists, reassured our regional partners, and kept our homeland safe.

President Biden pretends that none of this was possible. He claims that he had two options: a massive deployment or zero troops, which is not true. In fact, I publicly supported a third option: maintain a small force to preserve our air power. We can't do the air power without some troops on the ground. We needed to have some troops on the ground—we did—counterterrorism operations and military options.

Many of us here supported a small, tailored deployment to protect our core interests, and so did his own military advisers. Yet, when he was asked, "Did your top military advisers warn against withdrawing on this timeline? Did they ask you to keep 2,500 troops?" President Biden said, "No, they didn't. That wasn't true."

But it was true. We talked to the—in fact, you are going to find something out this coming Tuesday when we have a hearing. We are going to have many of the principals whom we really haven't heard from, principals who were involved in advising the administration as to what the military wanted and didn't want.

Except it was. We know that now. The former commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, General Miller, told the Senate Armed Services Committee just this last week—this is our committee, the committee I chaired for some period of time—he said no. Now, he didn't tell President Biden directly because President Biden didn't even bother calling his top commander on the ground before making his decision, but General Miller did report it to the chain of command.

Now, we are talking about General Miller. At that time, he was the top commander on the ground. So the President didn't even consult him as to whether or not we should—he made it very clear he advised him not to go, not to close everything up.

He also tried to say that al-Qaida is "gone" from Afghanistan and that "terrorism is not emanating from that part of the world." Well, we know that is not true. General McKenzie said al-Qaida remains the main focus in the region.

Last week, the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency—that is LTG Scott Berrier—said that the projected timeline for al-Qaida to have the capability to threaten our homeland is 1 to 2 years at most, if not sooner, and that is it.

So President Biden was not telling the truth in that area about having only two choices. He didn't tell the

truth about getting American families out of Afghanistan. He failed to tell the truth about the advice that he got from his military commanders, saying that his military commanders did not advise him. We know better than that, and if you don't know it, stick around for next Tuesday, and you will find out. He didn't tell the truth about al-Qaida not being a threat.

So I have to wonder, if he is not telling the truth about this, what else is he not telling the truth about? If we can't trust the President on this, if we can't trust him to tell the truth and we can't trust him to put together a good strategy in Afghanistan, how can we trust him to protect the Nation from our strategic competitors?

After watching President Biden stumble badly in Afghanistan, I am worried that he won't pursue a strong strategy to push back on China, and China is our top threat right now. We all know that. We don't like to talk about it, but it is true.

As former Secretary Gates famously wrote in his memoir, President Biden has "been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades." That was Secretary Gates, former Secretary of Defense.

I am also worried about the administration desperately trying again to return to the Obama administration's failed Iran deal and offering Iran massive sanctions relief, sanctions that were put on in the previous administration to get their—of course, we know Iran would just use the sanctions relief to ramp up terrorism.

You know, I don't know how the American people—maybe it is the people in Oklahoma. They are the ones I have talked to more than any other groups. You know, what else would they do? What would Iran, with their background, do with sanction relief or with funds? They would use it on terrorism. That brings us back to Afghanistan, which is only one of many, many examples in the Middle East and North Africa where the administration has no plan for countering terrorists and keeping us safe.

President Biden and his administration have broadly talked about a new over-the-horizon strategy to counterterrorism. "Over the horizon" means that we don't have boots on the ground. We send airplanes in from afar—something our military leaders have told us is way more difficult than most people believe, far more expensive, and almost impossible without partners on the ground.

We can't do it. You can't just lead with military airpower. Even if it is possible, experts are telling us it won't be effective. We haven't even seen a plan for how this will be enough to keep American families safe.

This is a failure of leadership. Along the way, President Biden has tried to blame everyone else—the Afghan Security Forces, the Afghan Government, and the previous administration. But

the blame lands squarely on him, and he owns this.

We should expect his failures in Afghanistan to bleed into other issues. China and Russia see a weak America now. Terrorists see safe havens and use Afghanistan as a rallying cry.

I still have a lot more questions and expect President Biden and his administration to have more answers. Thirteen brave Americans died in the chaos created by President Biden's policies. We need explanations and we need accountability.

We are going to hear from Secretary Austin, General Milley, and General McKenzie next week. This is going to be on Tuesday. I have reminded people of that for a long time because we need to have a clear understanding, and we will get that understanding. We are going to start to understand this—just what went wrong, who is to blame, and what we need to do to protect ourselves. This is going to be an open meeting. This is not a classified meeting. This is an open meeting that is going to take place this coming Tuesday. We are going to be doing this as transparently and openly as possible because the American people deserve the truth. Our servicemembers and their families who sacrificed so much over the last 20 years deserve that, too, and we are going to give them the truth. That is going to happen next week.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MURPHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE CHILD TAX CREDIT

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, it is always a thrill to come to the floor to talk about the child tax credit, especially with three colleagues who really are the authors and the most important pushers, if you will, of this bill in the Senate.

I am going to turn it to Senator BENNET—he and I worked on this for damn close to a decade now—and Senator BOOKER. And then we will be joined last by Senator WARNOCK, who has only been in the Senate for a year—not even—and has done so much already for the State of Georgia, and he is one of the best supporters of this in the U.S. Senate.

So I will reserve my comments for a little later. Senator BENNET will go first.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I want to thank my colleague from Ohio, Senator BROWN, for his remarkable leadership in getting us to this point with the child tax credit and with the earned income tax credit for childless families which, thanks to his leadership, we have been able to triple.

But I think we are here today on a really, really momentous matter. When I think back to the days when I was the superintendent of schools in Denver, most of the kids in my city were kids of color and most were living in poverty, and many of their families were working two or three jobs. And no matter what they did, they couldn't get their kids out of poverty.

Today, now, I travel the State of Colorado, a State that has got very rural areas and very urban areas. If I had to summarize the last 10 years of my townhalls—10 or 11 years—it is very easy to do it. No matter what county I am in, people say: We are killing ourselves, and no matter what we do, we can't afford some combination of housing, healthcare, higher education, early childhood education—if there is any childhood education. We can't save. We feel like our kids are going to live a more diminished life than the life we lived.

That is the anecdotal reflection of an economy that, for 50 years in this country, has worked really well for the top 10 percent of Americans and not for anybody else. The result of that is, today, the United States is 38th out of 41 industrialized countries, in terms of childhood poverty.

The poorest people in our society are our children. The poorest generation in the United States of America are our children, which is scandalous.

Senators BROWN, BOOKER, WARNOCK, and then-Senator HARRIS, before that, and I came together to try to address it and to say that we don't have to accept this much childhood poverty as a permanent feature of our economy or a permanent feature of our society. We can actually fix this by making three changes to the child tax credit: to increase the amount and make it fully refundable, so that for the first time in our country's history the poorest kids have the benefit of it; and to have it paid out on a monthly basis, so that when parents and grandparents are at the end of the month trying to make the rent or buy a few more groceries or pay for a little bit more childcare, they are able to do it in real time.

I am sure my colleagues on the floor today spent time meeting with people in their States over the recess. I did. I met mostly moms, but parent after parent after parent, who said to me: For the first time in my life, I was able to buy back-to-school clothes, and I didn't bankrupt my family. Buying back-to-school clothes was not a catastrophe for my family. My kid was able to go to school in a new shirt.

One mom in Colorado Springs said to me that she bought a bicycle for her son so he could take himself to school and participate in afterschool programs that he wouldn't have otherwise been able to participate in, because he could take himself there and bring himself back.

She said that he had burst a tire on this new bicycle and that she was able, because of the child tax credit, not to

buy the cheap tire that she would ordinarily buy that would break next week—as she said—but to buy a tire that the kid could rely on. She said, “That is what being poor in America is like; you have to pay a tax on everything,” because you can't buy a decent pair of shoes and you can't buy a decent tire for a bike.

This is a reason why 450 economists have written to the administration saying we should be making this permanent. And I believe we should be making it permanent. They have also pointed out that it is very important for people to hear that this is pro-work. The countries that have child allowances like this actually have a higher percentage of people in the workforce than we do, because people can use that allowance to pay for a little extra childcare so they can stay at work. They can use that allowance to help pay to fix a car so they can stay at work. This is a pro-work policy.

Just as importantly, childhood poverty costs our country \$1 trillion a year. We have been told by Columbia University that we are going to see an 8x annual return as a result of cutting childhood poverty in half this year, which this policy does, as opposed to spending money just to mitigate the effects of childhood poverty.

So there is every reason in the world that we should make this permanent, that we should extend it. In my view, we can't afford not to, and that is why we are here today.

I want to thank my colleague from New Jersey, Senator BOOKER, somebody I have known since he was mayor of Newark and I was the superintendent of the Denver Public Schools, and we were working together to try to lift up kids in our respective communities. There have been many times when I have been on this floor and I have said that we are treating America's children like they are someone else's children, that only a country that didn't care about their kids would treat our kids the way we have.

But, finally, we are not. Finally, we said: We are not going to tolerate this. And a lot of that has to do with the Senator from New Jersey's leadership.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I want to thank the two leaders that I joined, Senators BROWN and BENNET, for championing this issue, not just for this Congress but for years. Before I came to Washington, these two men were standing up and talking about the moral core of our country.

If you want to see how a nation is doing, don't look at the buildings we build or at how many billionaires we have. Just look at children. What is galling me right now is that we have come to the 1-yard line.

We are at an inflection point in our country where we have to ask a question: Who are we?

My friend Senator BENNET and I have been working with kids well before we

came here. He rattled off data that should be repeated. I say this is a moral issue, but he has shown us it is an economic issue. We are the wealthiest Nation on the planet Earth, and of the top 41 countries, we are at 38 in poor kids. What he pointed out is that poverty costs all of us. It is a deep, self-inflicted wound in this society, because poverty costs this Nation over \$1 trillion as measured by economists.

But I would state that economists don't measure all the things that are important. Our GDP does not reflect well-being. It doesn't reflect how many antidepressants people take or how many child deaths there are. But the truth of our economy is that every dollar that we invest in getting children out of poverty returns \$8 to this economy. So it is an economic issue, clearly.

It is a globally competitive issue because in a global, knowledge-based society, the Nation whose children learn the most will earn the most and will outcompete.

It is a national security issue as we go up against countries like China, whose top 10 percent of their graduating high school classes outnumber all the children we have, virtually.

But it is a moral issue most of all. If we are going to create a more beloved community, how do we treat our children?

Children who live in poverty literally have physical effects. Poverty is violence. Study after study shows that the brain development of children in poverty is inhibited, literally—the stress hormones, the cortisol. It is akin to an adult having a traffic accident every single day. It is an indicator of childhood trauma.

Poverty is a moral obscenity, and we, the richest Nation on the planet, where, year after year, our rich are getting richer, our children are getting poorer—who are we when we pledge allegiance to a flag and say “liberty and justice for all”? Who are we?

We don't even know the demographic changes in our country. We have cities across America where 1 out of every 10 children is being raised by a grandparent. So here we are discussing childhood poverty, and some people are talking about work requirements, when we know from the data, from conservative think tanks to what we see in other nations like Canada, that things like the child allowance—or in our country, the child tax credit—increase workforce participation. But if you get rid of the child tax credit, those grandparents raising grandchildren—half of them—plunge back into poverty.

The stories are profound.

We heard from my colleague from Colorado. We know families in New Jersey, like a woman I just saw named Margarita. She used her child tax credit payments for exactly what so many said they would be used for. She used them for food for her children, for school supplies, to keep the electricity running in her house. We have heard

stories that they are used for a car bill to get people to work. They are used to pay for childcare that they need for their families so that they can work. Families are not using this money so they could quit their jobs. Quite the contrary, they are using them so they can get to work.

We are a nation in crisis because of how we treat our children. The child tax credit is a lifeline for the millions of grandparents raising grandchildren. It is a lifeline for low-income children.

So you heard from Senator BENNET. We are at an inflection point. What will we do right now? Will we extend the child tax credit? Will we make the full refundability permanent? Will we keep people having these monthly checks? That is a policy question. But the question before us really is a moral one. For once and for all, this is not partisan. It is a defining moment for the character of our country, and I say words are not enough.

We should show the child tax credit—the truth in our policies and what we do with our budgets. We should show our love through what we do, not what we say. And the best leading indicator of that will always be how the most vulnerable in our society are doing, how we take care of our elderly, and, in this case, how we care for our children.

I am honored now to have come to the floor our Senator from Georgia. I would remark that as much as I love the Senator from Ohio and the Senator from Colorado, the Senator from Georgia has a much better haircut.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank Senator BOOKER, and I join my friend Senator WARNOCK here to talk about this. Thanks to Senator BENNET, Senator BOOKER, and Senator WARNOCK for their leadership on what I think is the most important thing I have done in my years in public office: the child tax credit that Senator BENNET and I began on years and years and years ago, joined by other colleagues. Senator WARNOCK has really taken it over in a big way this year in getting it across the finish line. Sorry for the sports metaphor, but that is how important this is.

Senator BENNET said something about—and I guess Senator BOOKER—that raising children is work. At least one of my colleagues—a number of my colleagues on that side of the aisle, and I believe a colleague or two on this side of the aisle, said something about a work requirement in a child tax credit. And I don't understand that because I spent a lot of time, including this weekend, with my grandchildren, and I see how hard my daughters work raising children and our son works raising children and the pressures. And this bill, cutting everything else away, relieves some of the anxiety that parents face, the anxiety of how do I get the money together to pay the rent this week, before the end of the month, so I

don't get evicted or I don't get behind in my rent—just the opportunities for these parents.

So I want to talk directly—directly—to Ohio parents. We talk about parents and about the child tax credit. I want to talk to Ohio parents for a moment.

Parents, check your bank accounts. A week ago today, we once again put money directly in the pockets of the families of most Ohio parents. The families of 92 percent of Ohio children are getting these dollars either direct deposit in their accounts or in their mailboxes in checks. It started July 15, then August 15, and then September 15. It will continue. Our goal on the floor today is to make this permanent; at least to make sure this goes beyond the end of the year. We are going to succeed in doing that. It is so important that we do.

Back to talking to parents. We know how hard you work at your jobs and raising your kids. Any parent knows how much work it is to take care of children, especially young children. It has only gotten harder over the last year and a half. The pressures are greater. The anxiety placed on families is more.

We have not recognized in this country often enough that raising children is work. If you have a job outside the home, you are probably not getting paid what you are worth. We have seen what has happened over the past few decades.

Productivity has gone up. Stock prices have soared. Executive compensation is stratospheric. The wages have been flat. Wages for most Americans have barely budged; meanwhile, you all as parents know how expensive it is to raise kids—childcare, healthcare, school lunches, diapers, clothes, school supplies, braces, sports fees. The list never seems to end. That is not to mention trying to put money away—just a few dollars a month—trying to put money away for college or sending your kid to camp or maybe—maybe, as I have heard from some parents—for the first time in 2 or 3 years, they are going to get to take a little vacation for a few days or maybe, once a month, going out to dinner at the local diner.

You feel like you can't keep up no matter how hard you work. It is why we passed the child tax credit. It is why we started, several years ago, working to get other Senators on board until we had virtually, literally, every Senator on this side of the aisle. Every single Democrat has voted for the child tax credit twice already.

Unfortunately, every single Republican voted against it. I don't even really understand why they are against it when, you know, you could look out down the aisle here, you can look down the hall, and Senator MCCONNELL's office is down the hall, and you see the lobbyists lining up there. They always get their tax cuts.

A train carrying tax cuts leaves the station whenever Republicans are in

power—a tax cut for wealthy people—but this is a tax cut for working families, and we know how important that is. It is finally—finally—to America's parents, making your hard work pay off so you can keep up with those extra expenses that keep coming and coming and coming when you are raising a family.

Stories have poured into our office from parents across Ohio about these tax cuts. Let me just give you snippets of several of them.

Katie in Akron: It helps pay for school supplies.

Caitlin: It pays for preschool for my son.

Lindsay: It is back-to-school clothes. Fern: It will pay for preschool for both of my children, and the rest is going into a savings account for them.

From Melissa: I used part of it to buy school uniform pieces for my 4-year-old.

Jennifer: Put it away for college tuition.

Maia: Food and school supplies.

And one of the most common stories we hear over and over is that parents are using this to afford childcare so they can go back to work or keep working or work a few more hours.

One mother from Minford in Southern Ohio near Portsmouth, wrote to me, and she said:

My husband and I are middle class, raising two children [both] under 6. . . . We have been worried about the financial burden of paying for 2 children in full-time child care.

The \$300, per child, will be placed directly towards child care so . . . we [don't] have to worry about how my participation in the workforce affects us, and allow us to participate more in the economy.

She continued:

I believe these payments will allow more parents, especially mothers, to participate more fully in the workforce, [allowing] them more time to pursue training, and help American families [get] food on the table. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

She really tells the story. You know in Connecticut and in Georgia that not everybody has gone back to work that could find work; in part, because employers are finally starting to pay more, but so much of the time because they can't find childcare or they can't afford childcare. We know that. That is what these tax cuts are all about.

They are about the dignity of work. All work has dignity, whether you punch a clock or swipe a badge, whether you work on a salary or work for tips, whether you are raising children, or whether you are caring for aging parents. Raising children is work. Raising children is work. It is a hell of a lot more work than moving money from one overseas bank account to another or checking the balance in your stock portfolio.

That didn't stop Senator MCCONNELL and the Republican majority 2 or 3 years ago from rewarding the CEOs and hedge fund managers and Swiss bank account holders. We all remember what happened. MITCH MCCONNELL—and the lobbyists lining up down the hall—and

the politicians who always do their bidding passed their tax cut for the wealthy and corporations that outsource jobs. You know what they promised? They promised it would all trickle down and have more jobs and workers in Savannah—the hometown of the Senator from Georgia—that there will be more jobs and the workers would get more pay and the companies would invest more in the workforce.

Well, it didn't exactly happen that way. They kept their money for themselves. They spent that money on stock buybacks. Unsurprisingly, where did that money go? It goes in the pockets, mostly, of executives.

Now, this year, without a single vote from Republicans in Congress, we passed tax cuts for everyone else. It is a pretty simple contrast.

Whose side are you on? Do you want tax cuts for billionaires and corporations—that is what they did 4 years ago; that is what the President and the Congress did 4 years ago—or do you want tax cuts for working families? That is what Senator WARNOCK's and Senator OSSOFF's and President Biden's elections meant in November and January of this year; that instead of more tax cuts for the richest people in the country—though that bill, 70 percent of the tax cuts or the benefits went to the richest 1 percent—now we are seeing our tax cut goes to 90 percent of the families in this country.

Every single month we are showing parents and workers we are on your side. We will not stop fighting to make sure parents' hard work pays off for years to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, I first want to say thank you to Senators BROWN, BENNET, and BOOKER for keeping a spotlight on this issue. I must admit, however, on this issue, when I say Senators BROWN, BENNET, and BOOKER, I think about the multiple choice questionnaires we got in school, and I am wondering how a guy with a last name "Warnock" got to be a part of this effort, but I am grateful.

I want to get right to the point. There are many reasons to move this Build Back Better American package forward. We have to build back better. We have a historic opportunity to make landmark investments that will strengthen our families, our economy, our care infrastructure, including expanding Medicaid benefits to more than 4 million Americans. We have got 600,000 Georgians in the Medicaid gap. We have got to provide critical debt relief for small farmers who have taken a financial hit during the pandemic. All of these things are covered in this Build Back Better agenda.

But the other top priority of mine, and why we are all here today, is that we have a chance to extend the expanded child tax credit. We have already seen it making a difference in the lives of over 2.2 million children just in Georgia alone.

I want to be clear about who this tax cut helps because people who have no vision engage in division, and sometimes when we are discussing these policies, we need to slow down and make sure folk know exactly whom we are talking about.

Ninety-seven percent—97 percent—of American families with children would benefit from this tax cut. After we passed the American Rescue Plan, we significantly expanded the child tax credit and the earned income tax credit.

To put more money in the pockets of working families, I remember that Senator BOOKER—actually, Senator BENNET called me from his car. He was on his way back home. I had just gotten elected, and just a few short months after I got elected, we passed the American Rescue Plan because we won the majority and were able to do this. Senator BROWN said to me: RAPHAEL, this is one of the best days of my career because we were able to pass the American Rescue Plan with all of these amazing provisions, and this provision alone is transformational. Experts have said that this investment that we made earlier this year would cut child poverty in half nationwide. Think about that. One provision. Just giving ordinary people, hard-working families, a break cuts child poverty in half. This is good public policy.

But I will tell you what would be bad public policy. It is bad public policy to cut child poverty in half one year and then go back the very next year and double child poverty. That is poor public policy. It is not right, and it is not smart.

The expanded child tax credit is helping Georgians. And do you want to know how I know that? I know because, as I am moving across the State, they are telling me. And it is no surprise, when you put an extra \$200 or \$300 in the bank account of ordinary people, working people, it makes a huge difference.

In my regular travels around the State, Georgians have told me how this tax cut for working families has made a difference in their lives, made their lives just a little bit easier, especially at the start of a new school year.

A few weeks ago, I was down in Columbus, GA, and I met with some of the hard-working families who receive this tax cut. And as I stand here, I think about Dante and Alicia, a couple I met down in Columbus, GA. Their daughter's name is London. And I asked them: What are you going to do with this monthly payment?

And they said it will help cover the costs of school clothes and brain-building extracurricular activities. They have a very active young daughter, very bright, London. She came to the meeting. And they said that: We wouldn't be able to afford these extracurricular activities, but this extra support, just this little lift, has made a difference in our personal economy, and it has made a difference for London.

I talked to Will, who works as a local hairdresser, and the monthly payment helps his 12-year-old daughter participate in karate tournaments, a development opportunity that family would not otherwise be able to afford.

In another conversation, I asked a Georgia mom of two young, growing boys: Where would this tax cut go?

I said: What are you going to do with this tax cut?

Do you know what she said to me?

She said: I am going to buy food and shoes.

You know, when you give ordinary folk a break, when you give them an extra \$200 or \$300 a month, you know, they go and buy extravagant things, like food and shoes and a coat for their kid.

They invest in extracurricular activities because they want to see their children do a little bit better than they did. And when they invest in their children, in a real sense, they invest in all of our children.

When you give folk who already have everything they need and then some, you give them that money, they hold on to that money. But when you give money to ordinary folks, they put that money right back into our local economies and into our small businesses.

Often the right thing to do is also the smart thing to do. It creates jobs, helps all of us. And so the expanded child tax credit grows and bolsters our economy from the bottom up.

I agree with Senator BROWN. I am just old enough to remember when folks were talking about trickle-down economics. And as a pastor, I have worked and conducted my ministry in these communities that have been hearing folks talk about trickle down for the last 40 years. The way to grow an economy is from the bottom up. The right thing to do is the smart thing to do.

The expanded child tax credit is changing lives right now, and we have a chance in this economic package we are working on to secure this investment for working Georgians and Americans into the future, and that is why I believe we should make it permanent, and I will keep advocating for that. But extending this critical tax cut right now is the right thing to do for working families. We ought to do it. We ought not just talk about it; we ought to do it.

The Scripture says, He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require . . . but that you do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.

I see the face of God in the faces of our children.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. SMITH). The Senator from Texas.

VOTING RIGHTS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, in June, our Democratic colleagues voted on their first and initial efforts to nationalize our State-run and local-run election system. That bill—this legislation, this effort—had been years in the