

Mr President,

A year ago, my two little boys sat right up there in the gallery above as I raised my right hand here on the floor. It was a moment unlike any other moment I've had in my life.

My dear colleagues, I hope it's never lost on us that we get to work a job whose job description is written in the Constitution of the United States. What a deeply humbling experience, one we should treasure every chance we get.

Never in my life have I felt the call to serve so strongly and viscerally as I do right now. I believe we are in a moment of extraordinary consequence and magnitude. That the next 5 years will shape the next 5 decades. There is nowhere else I'd rather be than to have a voice in THIS room, and vote in this chamber on the monumental decisions that will shape our nation's future through tumultuous times.

But there is a bittersweet taste now a year later when I look back on that day I was sworn in.

By my children's side as they watched me a year ago, were my parents. Both born during the Korean War, both born into poverty and struggled to survive. Both saw America as a place where they could achieve the closest thing they could get to a guarantee that the family that they raise would have a better life than they did.

It was actually our predecessors in this room that passed the immigration reform that allowed my parents to come here. Had it not been for decisions right here, our family story had no chance in America. And the decisions we are making now are shaping families for generations to come.

I am in awe of what this nation has afforded my family in just 1 generation.

But now I think through an episode that happened a few weeks ago. I was with my father at the doctor's office. The doctor asked my father, "tell me about your son, tell me what he does for a living."

My father was silent. Looked at me with embarrassed eyes and said "I don't know."

My father no longer remembers being in this chamber a year ago. He no longer remembers that momentous day I hoped we would never forget. He no longer remembers that his hard journey from the Korean War to immigrating here led to his son being sworn in as a first ever Korean American Senator.

And it got worse. The next question the doctor asked him, “What job did I you have? What was your life’s work?”

My father looked down at the ground, paused, and said the same 3 words, “I don’t know.” 3 words that I’m sure I will hear more and more from him.

That was the day my father was diagnosed with Alzheimers.

What made this all the more painful is that the answer to the doctor’s question, what did my father do over his career, is that my father was a geneticist, a medical researcher who spent his life trying to cure cancer and Alzheimers.

And now as I was there witnessing Alzheimers erase from my father’s memory any recollection of his efforts to erase Alzheimers from our world, I couldn’t help feel that Alzheimer’s had won.

I remember dropping him off after the appointment and sitting in my car – alone – left to grapple with our new future. Realizing for the first time that to my list of core identities – as a son, a brother, a husband, a father, an American, a public servant – I now add caregiver.

With all of my other identities I've assumed, I embraced them. They brought me joy and opportunity. They brought me my partner for life and the most precious boys I could ever imagine.

But this new identity as caregiver felt like it brought my family certain pain. The doctor warned me the next year or two of my life would be hell.

I remember having to rush back to the Capitol for votes after that doctor's appointment.

I was standing in this very spot and one of you came to me and started telling me about a bill you wanted me to look at. I remember politely saying, "I'm sorry but I'm barely keeping it together right now. My father's not well. Can we please talk about this tomorrow?"

Instead of walking away, my colleague stayed, showed me comfort. Opened up about their own struggles and challenges in their family.

And I responded with my growing fear about the uncertainty that lay ahead, that I would be forced to seek not the best care that my father can get, but instead the best care for my father that my family could afford.

I suddenly felt inadequate as a son. I panicked.

I couldn't help but playback the last few years and beat myself up that I didn't see this coming.

Was there something I could have done to better prepare for this moment? I should have seen the warning signs and took precautions to provide better care to my father and my family.

I fixated on a singular question:

Why is it so hard to provide care in this country?

From that question, others came:

Why is providing care so insanely complicated?

And why does it feel like we are alone as we try to provide care for the people we love?

And for many the disease or injury is only part of the problem. We are the richest, most powerful country in the world. Why does it cost so much to provide care?

The answers explain my anxiety.

The median cost for a private room in a senior care facility in New Jersey is \$14,788 per month.

That's over \$177 thousand per year.

That is outrageous. It should be unacceptable. Who can afford that?

I'll tell you, I can't.

I look at the cost and I look at our finances and the costs of caregiving have been catastrophic for my family.

But this is the reality for millions of Americans.

And so many countless families are in much more dire circumstances than mine. They tell me how they are having to basically bankrupt themselves; a neighbor told me how she has to sell their forever home that they hoped

they would grow old in, just to pay her husband's bills for his dementia care. This is the storm after the storm.

A storm of our own making. And out of this strain and stress, we feel alone. It shouldn't have to be this hard.

And on top of this, I feel overwhelmed by a nagging feeling that my new identity as a caregiver is in direct competition with my other identities. That it diminishes and drains what I could provide to my kids as their father and to others that I love.

I can't save for their education like I planned to. I think of all the costs we endured through daycare, health care, and all the experiences I want to provide my boys.

Even if you can afford all that, what an anxiety filled time it is to be raising two kids.

You can try to keep them off of social media, our phones, but it dominates the conversations they have with their friends.

You can try to give them the best education but you look at a future where AI dominates and you worry if they will find a job that provides them stability and security.

And I see the world around us. The wars and the divisiveness.

It's so much that at times it feels hard to breathe.

I asked myself a question: What kind of America are my two boys, your kids and your grandkids, going to grow up in?

Regardless of the political parties to which we belong, I think we can all agree that a nation this powerful and this extraordinary should not be mired in this level of division.

My boys are 8 and 10 now. That gives me about 15 years before they are off on their own.

Actually, many of you have told me that it'll be much longer as they will move back into our basement after college.

But that's my timeline. I've got about 15 years to try and fix this for them.

That's why I'm here. I'm a father that will do everything I humanly can to fix this country for my kids.

But I'm worried. I'm worried because we stand here in this chamber under this ubiquitous phrase.

E pluribus unum.

Out of many...one.

It is the same motto that perches over the Capitol rotunda, the House chamber, the Oval Office.

But does it ring true, especially in this divided moment?

It often feels that it is more like out of many...many. E Pluribus Multis.

I still believe in E Pluribus Unum.

It's a beautiful and telling phrase.

But one day I realized that it's missing something.

How does many turn into one?

The phrase, it's missing the verb.

How do we get from Many to One?

It doesn't just happen on its own.

Being the nerd that I am, I dug around and tracked down the origin of the phrase, back to Cicero at the dawn of republics, and found the missing Verb.

He says, “When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many.”

The missing verb is “to love.” But how do we express that love to each other?

Another way to think about it, when we care for another as we would care for ourselves.

Care is how we manifest our love of nation, love of each other.

And this is the realization I have come to.

E Pluribus Unum requires love and care.

How we become one out of many is to be caregivers to one other. We here in this chamber are to be caregivers to the nation, a nation that right now needs healing. A nation whose future is uncertain and unsteady.

My role as a caregiver takes on new meaning. The care with which I transfer my father to his wheelchair and wash his disabled body is but an example of the care with which we must handle our nation in fragile times.

In my new role, I've learned that care must flow in all directions, not just towards those we feel attached to. I've not shared this publicly before, but my father and I have had a difficult relationship over our lives. We've gone through tough times of division and separation. I'd be lying to you if I told you that being a caregiver to him is easy and flows naturally from love. It's hard to provide care if it doesn't always feel reciprocal. And there are times I feel guilty when I feel trapped.

But for all the faults that he and I embody, it doesn't diminish responsibility. I will give him a good and decent life as best as I can provide.

I bring that same sense of responsibility into this chamber with a nation divided. I believe that one can and should care for another in our nation even in the face of division and disagreement. Just as caregivers have a responsibility to those in our care, we – as Senators and as Americans – have a responsibility to one another – as community members, as people. And here in the Senate, it's where we should exemplify this action of care.

I have seen glimpses of what the Senate can be. This sacred ground that we get the honor to embody, it's not just a place of heated debate and consequential vote. It

can and must be a place of care, not just for those of us in this chamber, but for a nation. The care you have shown me, from the ear with which you have listened to my telling of my troubles, let us pour that out of these doors and give it towards the 7 million Americans afflicted with Alzheimers, the tens of millions more who are families struggling with the struggles of their loved ones.

Let our care pour out to the tens of millions of parents who struggle to give their kids the kind of the life they want.

Today, in this maiden speech, I make a promise to the people of New Jersey and the people of this country that for as long as I have the chance to serve here, I will do everything I can to give you the care you deserve. I will care for your parents and grandparents as hard as I will for mine. I will care for your kids and grandkids as much as I care for mine.

I will not be perfect. I will stumble at times. But I have learned as a caregiver, I have no other choice but to

endure. Whether it's the emergency calls in the middle of the night or the drop everything moments where I have to rush to the hospital. There is no alternative. As a caregiver, we are the backstop.

We here in this chamber need to be that for the ailing nation. We are the backstop.

There are times where it will be, to again quote my father's doctor, "hell", not just for my family, but for our country.

But there's no greater cause than care.

No bigger responsibility exists than the one we have to the people we love, and that extends to the nation we love.

And there's no larger obligation that we have – as Senators and as Americans – to make it easier to look after each other.

This is my maiden speech. One day I will stand here again to give my farewell speech. The duration between these two speeches will I hope not be measured in years, but instead by the problems I sought to tackle and solve.

In between these speeches I hope we meet the urgency and lead our nation forward with strategy and purpose.

I've often said that we work in what's arguably the most reactionary building in America, reacting to the headlines, the social posts. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Instead, we can be a Senate that sets out real goals and builds a strategy to meet them. Where do we want our Nation to be in 10, 20, 30 years from now?

I want to be a part of that Senate. A Senate unafraid to pursue big ideas.

I hope in my future farewell speech I can say I was a part of the Senate that finally delivered universal health care for our nation.

A Senate that found the way to provide child care to every family and long term care for every senior in need.

A Senate that catalyzed the innovation that led to prevent and cure Alzheimer's and other wretched diseases.

A Senate that finally gave care to our caregivers who for so long have felt invisible and taken for granted.

A Senate that stood up against corruption and restored trust of the American people back into our democracy and governance.

A Senate that helped restore American global leadership which shaped a world where peace and prosperity fosters freedom and innovation – for everyone.

A Senate that created the kind of America where I can ease my anxiety as a parent as I watch my boys become men.

Colleagues, I asked you to be here because I need your help. None of us have this power alone, and the nation is looking to us to right the ship and give a vision we can be proud of.

To my staff, I promise you this will be a noble journey you will be proud to be a part of.

I know this will be hard and could very well fall short of our lofty goals. But I want no regret in my time here in this sacred Chamber.

That I can say I did everything I could. I have no regrets about the time I spent in here...being a caregiver to our great nation, to make One out of Many.

I'm ready. Let's get to work.

With that, I yield back.