

laid last night was extremely important.

The Republican leader and I have talked individually, personally, away from everyone, about the need to get this done for the integrity of the Senate, and the colloquy last night helped what I think the Republican leader and I wish to get done. We need the agreement of Senate Republicans and Democrats that we will work together to complete this important work, and they talked about appropriations bills.

Senator WARNER and Senator HAGAN joined Senator PRYOR; Senators ISAKSON, COLLINS, BOOZMAN, and GRAHAM joined Senator ALEXANDER. So it was a significant number of Senators who talked about wanting to do the same thing and I commend and applaud their work.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Will my friend yield for me to make a couple observations on what he just said?

Mr. REID. I will yield.

Mr. MCCONNELL. We have negotiated the top line for the discretionary spending for this coming fiscal year. That process is normally done by the passage of a budget by the House and a budget by the Senate, with some reconciliation between the two bodies on the top line. But we already have that number. I wish to second what my friend the majority leader said. There is no good reason for this institution not to move forward with an appropriations process that avoids what we have done so frequently under both parties for years and years: either continuing resolutions or omnibus appropriations.

We have an opportunity to avoid that this year. It is the basic work of Congress. I wish to second what the majority leader said and congratulate Senator ALEXANDER and Senator PRYOR for their leadership on this issue. I hope we can join together and do the basic work of government this year and do it in a timely fashion.

I commend the majority leader and associate myself with his comments.

Mr. REID. I have spoken to Senator INOUE, the chairman of the Appropriations Committee. He is beginning, with Senator COCHRAN, the hearing process where administration officials come in and report to the individual appropriations subcommittees.

Senator INOUE thinks that, come late April, we can start moving some of these bills to the floor. We have to wait until the House does something because otherwise we get into procedural hurdles. But the House, I am told, wants to move these quickly also. I hope we can get these bills done.

The first real good experience I had in the Senate was working as a conferee on individual appropriations bills. That is fun. That is what legislation is all about and we have gotten away from that and I hope we can get back to doing some good things in that regard.

THE AUTO INDUSTRY

Mr. President, when President Obama took office 3 years ago, the auto

industry was on a life support system. It was in very bad shape. I am sorry to say the life support system the Detroit auto industry was surviving on, Republicans wanted to pull the plug.

One man who is now seeking the Republican nomination for President of the United States said, "We should kiss the American automobile industry good-bye." We can't make up stuff like that. That is what he actually said. He called the death of American auto manufacturers "virtually guaranteed." "Virtually guaranteed" is another direct quote. So he argued we should let Detroit go bankrupt. But he wasn't alone. If he were alone, that would be a lone wolf crying in the wilderness, but that is not the way it was. Republicans in this Chamber agreed. Many of them agreed.

Democrats, though, weren't willing to give up on American manufacturing because saving the automobile industry wasn't about saving corporations; it was about saving millions of Americans who work for these corporations. It wasn't about saving the people who own race cars; it was about saving the people who work on assembly lines making the parts to keep those race cars running.

There is no way Democrats would walk away from millions of Americans whose jobs were on the line. Americans working in dealerships and distribution centers and manufacturing plants across the country were depending on us to do something, and we did. We didn't give up the fight to save the auto industry. We didn't give up even when one Senate Republican called the efforts "a road to nowhere."

Here, the verdict is in. We were right. The American auto industry has added 160,000 jobs in the last 24 months alone. Last year, General Motors reported record profits and sold more vehicles than any other car company in the world. Chrysler is profitable again. People are boasting about the quality of American cars, and Chrysler is growing faster in the United States than any other major automobile manufacturer.

So when a Republican Presidential frontrunner said we should kiss the American automobile industry good-bye, he couldn't have been more wrong. We all make mistakes. We all get one wrong occasionally. The test of character is admitting when we make that mistake, and it is time for Republicans to recognize that saving the American automobile manufacturing industry and millions of middle-class jobs was the right thing to do.

There is good news from the auto industry: Twenty-four months of private sector job growth is evidence our country is headed in the right direction. But too many Americans are still hurting financially and struggling to find work, and it is crucial Congress continue efforts to create jobs and rebuild our economy. So Democrats are moving forward with a bipartisan package of bills that will spur small business growth.

These measures will improve innovators' access to capital—that is so important—and will streamline how companies sell stocks through initial public offerings or, as they are called, IPOs. These pieces of legislation will also protect the rights of investors.

Next week, Chairman JOHNSON, the senior Senator from South Dakota, will hold a Banking Committee hearing on this issue. It will be the third hearing on these measures since December. Senate Democrats have been working on these measures for a long time, and I am so happy to have read that House Republicans are joining Democrats to move this legislation. Commonsense issues such as these should not have to turn into knock-down, drag-out fights. This is something on which we should agree.

These companies need the ability to get cash to innovate, to grow, to build. This legislation that is being promulgated in the Banking Committee and the hearing that takes place there is very important to our country. I look forward to moving these measures and our economy forward with the help of my Republican colleagues.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

ENERGY POLICY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, over the past few weeks, the American people have begun to feel the painful effects of President Obama's energy policy.

Make no mistake, the rising price of gasoline isn't simply the result of forces we can't control. It is, to a large extent, the result of a vision this President laid out even before he was elected to office. That vision was on clear display just last week.

As millions of Americans groaned at the rising cost of a gallon of gasoline, the President took to the microphones to talk about a far-off day when Americans might be able to use algae as a substitute for gas. Then, dusting off the same talking points Democrats have been using for decades, he claimed there is no short-term solution to the problem.

In other words, he kicked the can down the road for another day, another time, abdicating leadership on yet another issue of national significance.

This morning, I think it is worthwhile to take a step back from the rhetoric and look at what this President has actually done about this problem and what his energy policies would mean for the future because, according to numerous private and public energy experts, gas prices are only going to keep rising in the weeks and months ahead, going up and up. Some say the average price for a gallon of gasoline could hit \$4 by late spring, early summer, and could reach \$5 or even \$6 in some areas of our country. When that moment comes, Americans should know what the administration had to do with it.

For starters, let's not forget that as a candidate the President himself said he preferred what he called a "gradual adjustment" to gas prices—in other words, higher prices that went up slowly so people did not feel the pinch quite as acutely. Let's also recall that after his election the President chose an Energy Secretary who said he wanted gas prices more in line with those over in Europe, where folks pay about \$8 a gallon for gas. That is what they pay for gas over in Europe, where the Energy Secretary said we should be looking to establish gas prices. Let's not forget that the President chose as Interior Secretary a man who, as a U.S. Senator, objected to increased oil and gas drilling here at home even if the price of gas exceeded \$10 a gallon—right here on the Senate floor. So no one should be surprised at the fact that we are well on the road to European gas prices when the President and the two Cabinet officials he chose to deal with the issue are all on record supporting them.

Let's be honest, the only problem the President sees in all of this is the political blowback he is getting for it, and that is why last week he gave another speech—this time to absolve himself from any of the blame for high gas prices even as he sought to take credit for the actions of the private sector and that his predecessors took to increase energy production here at home.

It is kind of interesting—the President seems to blame his predecessor on a weekly basis for the problems we face today, but when he finds something he likes, he doesn't commend him but claims it as an achievement for himself. Yes, oil production is at an all-time high in this country, thanks to the decisions that were made before this President took office.

But let's be very clear about something: The actions of this President are driving down oil production, and here is how. This President continues to limit offshore areas of energy production and is granting fewer leases to public land for oil drilling. His administration is imposing regulations that will further drive up the cost of gasoline for the consumer. He wants to raise taxes on oil and gas—a proposal the Congressional Research Service tells us will increase the price of oil and gas and, by the way, send jobs overseas. And he alone rejected the Keystone XL Pipeline—a potentially game-changing domestic energy project that promises not only energy independence from Middle Eastern oil but tens of thousands of private sector jobs.

The President has done all of those things, all the while claiming there are not any silver bullets. The fact is this President's policies are designed and intended to drive up energy prices, reduce domestic oil production, increase our demand on foreign sources of oil, and drive high-paying American jobs overseas. Those are the direct results of the policies of this administration.

So forget the rhetoric; that is this President's record. It is in perfect keeping with the vision he set out at the beginning of his administration. This President will go to any length to drive up gas prices and pave the way for his ideological agenda. That is this President's notion of fairness, that struggling Americans pay more at the pump while their tax dollars go to prop up solar companies like Solyndra and the executives who run them into the ground.

I do not think it is particularly fair—speaking of fairness—for people who are out there trying to scrape a living together to subsidize bonuses for folks who would not even have a business without a taxpayer handout. That is not my definition of fairness, but that is the economy this President wants. That is what his policies lead to. That is his vision. So, in my view, reversing this President's wrongheaded energy policies is the silver bullet.

Look, the President can taunt his critics for suggesting that we actually use the resources we have, but I think the American people realize that a President who is out there talking about algae when they are having to choose between whether to buy groceries or fill up the tank is the one who is out of touch. Americans get this issue. They understand it fully. They get that we need to increase oil production right here at home, not simply by relying on pipedreams—pipedreams like algae—or by wasting billions of taxpayer dollars on more failed clean energy projects like Solyndra, especially at a time when we are running trillion-dollar deficits. We cannot afford it.

It is time for the President to join with Republicans and put American energy and economic security ahead of his own ideological agenda.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period of morning business until the hour of 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled by the leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first hour and the Republicans the second hour.

The Senator from Illinois.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I was heartened by the dialog between Senators REID and MCCONNELL this morning, talking about more bipartisan cooperation, civility, and cooperation to

try to deal with appropriations bills. I would like to commend to the Republican leader not just those important issues but the equally important issue of judicial nominations. It is no secret that the Senate's process for considering nominations has deteriorated under the Obama administration because of resistance from the Republican side of the aisle.

It is a long-honored tradition in America that a President of the United States fills vacancies on the Federal courts with the advice and consent of the Senate. That has been the process since the beginning of this Republic. Yet today we find stacked on our calendar literally 19 judicial nominees pending on the Senate floor. Fourteen of these nominees were reported from the Judiciary Committee last year, some of them as far back as October. They have been sitting here for months. Seventeen of the nominees were reported out of committee with broad bipartisan support, 12 of them unanimously. Ten nominees, incidentally, are supported by their Republican home State Senators.

The bottom line is that judicial nominees with no controversy and with widespread bipartisan approval are being held up on the Senate calendar and not approved. Why? I can tell you why. It is fairly clear. It is part of a strategy that says: If you hold up the judicial nominees as long as possible, in comes that moment of the so-called Thurmond rule or Thurmond tradition. This relates to Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, who basically said when we are engaged in the depths of a Presidential campaign, the Senate should stop approval of judicial nominees.

There is nothing in the law that requires that. There is certainly nothing in the Constitution. In fact, we have in our own way found exceptions in the past. But what we are seeing now is an effort by the Republicans to hold up or stop judicial nominees in the hopes that the positions will be left vacant through the entire calendar year and then, if they have their way at the polls, a Republican President will fill the vacancies a year from now with new nominees. That is crass. It is unfair.

The men and women who submit their names to be considered as judicial nominees go through a rigorous background check at many different levels—first by the Senators who would nominate them, then by the White House, then the routine examination by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, then once reported to the Senate Judiciary Committee for further investigation and hearing. Their lives are on hold during this process. They wait on the Senate. Once they have cleared these hurdles and finally reach the calendar, many of them believe they can breathe a sigh of relief. A unanimous vote or a strong bipartisan vote in the