

President Trump again suggested yesterday that a “shutdown could happen.” If a shutdown happens, as the President seemed to be rooting for in his tweet earlier this year, it will fall on his shoulders. His party controls the Senate, the House, and the Presidency.

Nobody here wants to see a shutdown. We Democrats are not interested in one. That is why we are working with our Republican colleagues in good faith to resolve all of the issues we have to solve before the end of the year, and it is in this spirit that Leader PELOSI and I will go to the White House this afternoon to discuss all of the issues before us.

It is no secret that one of the major sticking points—if not the major sticking point—in the negotiations is funding levels for programs that invest directly in economic growth and a social safety net for the middle class. Democrats are pushing for sorely needed funding to combat the opioid crisis, to shore up pension plans, to support veterans’ health, to relieve student loan debt, and build rural infrastructure.

Without a budget agreement that lifts spending caps on both defense and economic development in a fair and equitable manner, programs I have mentioned, and so many others—medical research comes to mind—could see their funding cut. Our veterans deserve better. People seeking recovery from opioid addiction deserve better. Hard-working pensioners deserve better. We must do both things—support the military and programs that create jobs and growth here at home—in equal measure. Both are very important.

I know there are some on the far right who say all the jobs programs and economic growth programs are unimportant, but most of us, Democrats and Republicans, believe both are important. The idea that both are important has been the basis of successful budget agreements going back several years, including the agreement we reached last April, where the military side and the domestic job, economic growth side were treated equally.

Unfortunately, it appears that the Freedom Caucus—a rather small bloc of hard-right House conservatives—is trying to derail another successful parity agreement. According to press reports, the Freedom Caucus is pushing for a very short-term extension of funding for jobs and economic development, while pushing for a long-term extension and a large increase for funding in defense. That is a ruse designed to slash funding for education, healthcare, infrastructure, and scientific research—all the things the Freedom Caucus, against the will of the overwhelming vast majority of Americans, doesn’t want the government to fund.

Make no mistake, the Freedom Caucus is gearing up to hurt the middle class on the budget, just like so many Republicans way beyond the Freedom Caucus did with their tax bill—just like on the tax bill. We Democrats are

going to defend the middle class because they need our help, too, and they have been forgotten by our Republican colleagues throughout the year, but this time, the Freedom Caucus’s actions, if they had their way, could lead to a disaster. Speaker RYAN must stand up and tell the Freedom Caucus, no, they cannot be allowed to hold hostage productive bipartisan budget negotiations with outrageous demands that hurt the middle class. If Speaker RYAN lets them have their way, it will cause a shutdown. It will be on the Freedom Caucus’ shoulders, Leader RYAN’s shoulders, and the President’s shoulders because such a bill could not pass either the House or the Senate—we are giving them fair warning right now—not right at the deadline.

DREAM ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, let me say a word about the Dream Act. Earlier this week, my friend, the senior Senator from Illinois, came to the floor to update the Senate on the progress he is making in his negotiations with Senate Republicans on an agreement that would provide a significant investment in border security in exchange for the Dream Act.

As I have said in the past, Democrats support real border security. We will be happy to join with Republicans to pass legislation to secure our border in exchange for the Dream Act. Those talks continue to make good progress. I hope we can reach an agreement soon.

SPECIAL COUNSEL MUELLER

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Mr. President, a word on the special counsel. Over the past few weeks, I have continued to hear Republican lawmakers and partisan media hosts attack the integrity of Special Counsel Mueller in a shameful display meant to undermine his investigation into the connections between the Trump campaign and Russia. Spuriously attacking Robert Mueller, one of the most respected and trusted civil servants in our country, is the surest route to losing all credibility.

I remind everyone on the right who are trying to muddy the waters on the Mueller investigation that Robert Mueller was a career prosecutor who has served both Republican and Democratic administrations in the most trusted of roles. He was appointed by President Trump’s own Deputy Attorney General. It defies credulity to lambaste him as partisan or biased. He is as straight a shooter as they come. This is bigger than one man. The attacks on Special Counsel Mueller and his investigation erode faith in the rule of law, that bedrock principle at the heart of our civic life.

If independent investigations into matters as grave as foreign interference in our elections succumb to intimidation and partisan slander, we will be no better than a third-world country. Rule of law will be gone, at

least for the President of the United States, which is something Americans have treasured for centuries. What has always defined American democracy is an unyielding faith in the rule of law—its power to check our people, as well as our Presidents. Special Counsel Mueller is the rule of law at work in our 21st century American democracy. Intentionally and spuriously impugning his integrity—not because he has done anything wrong but because they don’t like what he is doing; very partisan, very biased, very one-sided is their view—is not only inaccurate but damaging to a core ideal in our country—the independent and impartial rule of law. We must loudly reject the strident voices who engage in these attacks on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, on the issue of taxes, with the passage of the Republican Senate bill last Friday, the Republican Party has shrugged off its history as the party of tax cuts and become the party of tax hikes on the middle class. The Republican tax bill will end up raising taxes on millions of middle-class families to pay for corporate welfare.

As our Republican colleagues march us toward an enormous corporate tax cut, we have seen numerous companies start to announce plans to buy back more of their stock—not build factories, not create jobs, but to buy back their stock, which, of course, benefits the CEOs because the stock price goes up.

T-Mobile has announced \$1.5 billion in stock buybacks; Mastercard, \$4 billion; Bank of America, \$5 billion. Just this morning, three or more companies announced hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of buybacks. These companies, I would say to President Trump and I would say to my Republican colleagues, are not announcing new investments in their workforce or wage increases, as Republicans promised they would. They are announcing stock repurchasing programs that benefit their wealthy investors.

The tax bill will also saddle the next generation of leaders with larger deficits and debts, limiting our ability to make the kinds of investments we need to be making in education, infrastructure, and scientific research—a far surer path to good-paying jobs and raising wages than giving corporate America, already flush with cash, even more stock buybacks. For the same reason, those increased deficits, Republicans are now coming back and saying that they want to slash Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, making it even harder in America to access affordable healthcare and retire with dignity.

Speaker RYAN admitted it yesterday. He said: “We’re going to have to get back next year at entitlement reform, which is how you tackle the debt and

the deficit," and he specifically mentioned Medicare. They first create the deficit by these huge tax cuts for the wealthiest corporations and individuals, and then they take it out on the middle class by saying: We have no choice but to cut Medicare. What is the matter? I hope the American people will see this. I hope some of the news channels and radio commentators will note this, since those are the people who listen to them.

By the way, that is only what we know about the bill. It was muscled through the Chamber with such reckless haste, we are finding errors and consequences every day. In yesterday's *POLITICO*, Greg Jenner, a former top tax official in Bush's Treasury Department who helped write the 1986 tax reform bill, was quoted as saying:

The more you read [of the Republican tax bill], the more you go, "Holy crap, what's this?" We will be dealing with unintended consequences for months to come because the bill is moving too fast.

That is a Republican, a former tax official from President Bush's Treasury Department.

When we were debating the Affordable Care Act—a process that took over a year—the esteemed majority leader admonished: We need to slow down and get this right.

The tax bill, by comparison, spent hardly 2 weeks in the House and 3 weeks in the Senate, and it is a lot worse for the average middle-class person. I would say the same thing to the majority leader that he said to us: Slow down and get this right. There is no need to rush this hastily considered, highly complex, hugely consequential tax bill before some artificial deadline.

We have a responsibility to get this right for the American people, particularly the American middle class. I still believe the way to do it is through an open, transparent, and bipartisan debate.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, on December 10 of this week, we will celebrate International Human Rights Day. It is the 69th anniversary of the United Nations' adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It provided inalienable rights for everyone in this world to be entitled to basic human rights, regardless of their religion, regardless of their race, their color, their gender, their language, their politics, their national origin, their property, wealth, birth, whatever. You are entitled to basic human rights.

The declaration further goes on to say that the ignoring and contempt of human rights have been among the principal causes of the suffering of humanity. That clearly has been the case throughout the history of the world

and is still relevant today—very relevant today.

The interesting thing about the universal declaration is that it acknowledges that we all have responsibilities. This is not just a country responsibility; we, as citizens of the world, have an obligation to challenge when human rights are violated anywhere in the world. That is our responsibility. It is interesting that one of the responsibilities I have as the ranking Senate Democrat on the Helsinki Commission, which is the organization that monitors our participants and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe—that declaration, the Helsinki accords, which was entered into in 1975, was an acknowledgement of basic human rights; it is a responsibility of all the participating countries to adhere to basic human rights. The Helsinki accords also make it very clear that any member country of the OSCE has the right to challenge what is happening in any other country. We have a responsibility as global citizens to speak out when basic human rights are being violated.

I also point out that this is one of the basic tenets of America's strength. One value embodied in our Constitution, embodied in our history, is a respect for human rights, and it makes America the unique Nation it is. Yes, we are looked upon as a global power because of our military and economy, but I must tell you, the real trademark of America, the real value we give to the international debate is the fact that we bring a commitment to basic human rights and values as part of our DNA. That has been very much demonstrated in so many ways.

I am proud of many of our accomplishments on behalf of international human rights. America's leadership on trafficking in persons—there have been Democrats and Republicans who have taken the lead on this to make it clear that we will not tolerate modern-day slavery. We took the lead on that; Congress took the lead on that. We passed the "Trafficking in Persons Report." We now monitor activities in every country in the world, including the United States, in order to protect against modern-day slavery.

I am proud of the passage of, first, the Magnitsky statute, which dealt with Russia, and now the global Magnitsky statute, which says: If a country does not hold accountable their gross violators of human rights, we will not give them access to our banking system or the ability to visit our country. When we passed that law, other countries followed suit. Europe has enacted the Magnitsky statute, Canada has enacted it, and individual countries have enacted it. We show leadership, and the world follows. We have effective tools to say that we will stand up and live up to our commitments to enforce human rights.

What we often do is put a spotlight on those human rights defenders who are being persecuted around the world.

By putting a spotlight on it, we give them hope. That is what we did in regard to the human rights defenders in China, human rights defenders in so many places around the world.

Quite frankly, one of the principal functions of our missions in countries around the world is to be there to speak out for basic human rights, to speak out in support of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am proud of our Foreign Service officers who carry that mission every day in every country around the world.

When potential nominees for Ambassadors come before our committee, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, we question them as to their commitment to support American values on human rights and what they will do in the country they will be representing America in order to advance those causes. This is part of our responsibility based upon the United Nations declaration, but it is also part of what we need to do in order for us to stay safe.

We know there is a direct correlation between a country's respect for human rights and the amount of conflict, the amount of violence, the amount of insurgency that takes place within that country. Violent extremists will have a place to breathe if a country doesn't respect the human rights of its citizens. It is in our national security interests, in addition to doing what is right as a nation and as a global citizen.

We have challenges today. We have autocratic leaders around the world who are violating every day the human rights of their citizens. We need to help lead the international community. We see attacks on journalism and the rights of free press, where it is, in many places in the world, not safe to comment freely about what is happening in a country.

The LGBT community has been under constant attack in many parts of the world, and we need to defend their rights. Human rights defenders are being imprisoned in so many countries around the world. We need to stand up for their rights. Yes, in trafficking in persons, Senator CORKER and I recently put a spotlight on what is happening in Libya, where they actually have slave auctions that are taking place, where people are being sold. We can't be silent about those types of activities or, in our own hemisphere, about what is happening in Venezuela, where there is a government that is denying its own people the right of access to international humanitarian aid. People are dying in hospitals because they can't get medical supplies. We need to speak out about that.

Many of us have come to the floor to talk about the challenges we have as global citizens on the number of refugees, the displaced persons we have. We have numbers now that we haven't seen since the end of World War II of people who do not have a home, who are refugees. We need to do something