

our trading framework with our neighbors would send that number even higher, generate more wealth here at home, and create an estimated 176,000 new American jobs.

It is no wonder that so many Kentuckians and so many people around the country want Washington to get it done. I hear from everybody, from family farming operations to midsize manufacturers, to Fortune 500 firms, such as UPS and Toyota, that employ thousands and thousands in my State. All of them want this fairer, better playing field in trade with Canada and Mexico.

In a little more than a week from now, it will have been a full year since President Trump signed the draft agreement along with the leaders of Canada and Mexico—1 full year—but for months now, this generational agreement has been sitting on ice over in the House of Representatives. Speaker PELOSI has refused to allow a vote.

In public, House Democrats insist and insist that they care about more things than simply impeaching the President. They insist that they want to work together and legislate, but actions speak louder than words, and apparently, thus far, House Democrats have preferred to block 176,000 new jobs for American workers rather than put impeachment aside and get along with the White House for 5 minutes. It appears there is no governing priority—no matter how bipartisan, no matter how beneficial to American families—that will not take a backseat to impeachment.

Month after month, every time she has been asked about this subject, the Speaker of the House has offered the same empty rhetoric. She is always close to allowing the vote. Her conference is always “almost there, almost there,” but we have been almost there for months and months with no outcome in sight. Lots of talk but zero results.

Back in February, the Speaker was asked about the USMCA. She said, “I’m optimistic.” That was last February.

We heard the same thing in May and in June. “We want to pass this bill.” We heard the same thing through the summer and in September and in October. “Every day we’re becoming closer,” she said. A few weeks ago the Speaker said: “I think we are close . . . the last mile,” and she called this “the easiest trade deal that we’ve ever done.” A few days ago, the Speaker insisted, yet again, a vote was “imminent.” That was a few days ago.

This has been the House Democrats’ wild goose chase. This is what our American families, American job creators, and our partners in Mexico and Canada have had to put up with. Every time the Trump administration meets the Speaker halfway, she tries to move the goal post another 10 yards. She literally has not even updated her own talking points since Valentine’s Day—textbook obstruction.

Just in case anybody did not yet understand that the real roadblock here is partisan politics, I understand the Speaker hosted Richard Trumka yesterday, head of the AFL-CIO, a power player in leftwing Big Labor. He came to the Capitol to quell the uprising of the Democrats’ own Members who can’t believe this thing still hasn’t passed. How ironic. We are talking about a trade deal that would create more American jobs, and Democrats are considering outsourcing their judgment to Big Labor special interests, who, to my recollection, have not supported a single major trade deal in living memory.

Let’s get this straight. It sounds like the head of the AFL-CIO—an organization that has never supported any trade agreement—is now the guy who gives the go-ahead on USMCA? We are talking about a trade deal, and Democrats are considering outsourcing their own jobs to the head of AFL-CIO—really? I wish I were making this up.

Reporters got ahold of the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee yesterday, and he literally said the deal would move forward “if we can get Richard Trumka to agree.” So the head of the AFL-CIO—an organization that has never supported a trade agreement—is now the guy who has to green-light the USMCA, which would create 176,000 American jobs. No wonder they have a problem in the House. The chairman of the Ways and Means Committee literally said that this major trade agreement will move forward only if this major Democratic campaign contributor gives them permission.

Well, it appears that even some House Democrats are getting fed up with the absurdity. Here is what one of them said yesterday:

[Trumka] still says we’re at the five yard line. . . . So it feels like we’ve been at the five yard line for a while.

No kidding. This is the biggest opportunity the House Democrats have had in the entirety of their first year in power to do something significant and substantive for American families—to actually pass something new and real that can become law and strengthen our Nation. In other words, the USMCA is House Democrats’ final exam for their whole first year in power. And unless something turns around very quickly, after nearly a year of happy talk and empty promises, their leadership seems determined to flunk that exam. All impeachment, all the time—and even the most obvious win for American workers and small businesses gets blocked. That will be Democrats’ progress report if USMCA goes nowhere. Obviously, I hope that is not how this story ends.

Mexico has passed it. Canada is waiting on us. I believe a bipartisan majority of the Senate is ready to pass it. Our workers, our job creators, and our neighbors are just waiting on Speaker PELOSI. This is no time to kill a national victory out of political spite.

This is no time to outsource your judgment to special interests. The Speaker should allow a vote, and the House should send us the USMCA.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Barbara Lagoa, of Florida, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eleventh Circuit.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, with government funding set to expire tomorrow, the House of Representatives passed a continuing resolution yesterday to fund the government through December 20. It is now up to the Senate to pass the continuing resolution without much fuss and send it to the President’s desk before the deadline.

As the Republican leader and I work to set the time for that vote, we must look ahead. The continuing resolution will give appropriators additional time to get a bipartisan appropriations process back on track before the end of the year. The Senate has been able to process several noncontroversial appropriations bills, bipartisan, but several more can’t move forward until the Democrats and the Republicans both all agree on the allocations. You can’t do it with one party. That leads to trouble. In recent days, we have made some progress, and I hope the talks between both sets of appropriators—House and Senate, Democratic and Republican—will continue in good faith and in earnest after we finish the continuing resolution.

At the same time, there are several very important issues the Democrats are trying to address in the continuing

resolution that the Senate Republicans refuse to address. Most notably, the Republicans objected to restoring expired funding for the minority-serving institutions, including historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions, and predominantly Black institutions.

These are ladders up. Such a high percentage of people of color—people in minority groups—use these colleges to create great lives for themselves. They work hard, and they study. There are no alternatives for them other than these institutions. To hold the money back, which is what the other side is doing, is so wrong. It is so unfair.

The Democrats will not stop fighting the fight to help these institutions, and we are committed to securing this funding in any way we can. These are American dream institutions. If you believe in the American dream, you shouldn't be holding this money back.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Mr. President, on Syria, the Defense Intelligence Agency—it is like the CIA, but it is for the Defense Department; it is very well respected and very non-partisan and is great in many ways—released a new assessment yesterday that confirms, unfortunately, many of our worst fears. If people haven't seen this assessment, it is really important. I would urge people to look at it.

What did the assessment indicate?

President Trump's own Defense Department wrote that President Trump, by his precipitously withdrawing our troops from northern Syria, has given ISIS a lifeline.

In the chaos that has followed Erdogan's military offensive—an offensive, unfortunately, that President Trump green-lit, much to the consternation of people on both sides of the aisle—ISIS has had room to rebuild. Not only did the assessment suggest that the Islamic State is “postured to withstand” the recent death of its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, but it concluded that the Islamic State “exploited the Turkish incursion and subsequent drawdown of U.S. troops to reconstitute capabilities and resources within Syria and”—my emphasis but their words—“strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad.”

By President Trump's giving in to Erdogan, ISIS has been able to “strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad.” Every American should hear that. Let me repeat. Because President Trump abruptly withdrew U.S. troops from northern Syria, ISIS has been able to strengthen its ability to plan attacks abroad. That is not an assessment from some outside group or agency; that is the assessment of the Defense Intelligence Agency, which is part of the Pentagon. The Trump administration needs to get a handle on this situation fast.

Despite this new damning assessment, we still have no idea what the

President plans to do to ensure the enduring defeat of ISIS. President Trump has welcomed President Erdogan to the White House, but he hasn't produced a plan to defeat ISIS. This is an administration run amuck. This is security. This is vital to America. There is no plan about ISIS, but there is the greeting of Erdogan—a dictator whose desire to go after ISIS isn't close to ours. He would much rather go after the Kurds—our main protector from ISIS other than the United States itself.

Meanwhile, there are now reports that Russian forces have taken control of the former U.S. military base in northern Syria. The pictures of Russia's entering that deserted base because American soldiers were told they had to leave by the President is not a picture Americans want to see. It is incredible. The President continues to demonstrate an uncanny ability to get steamrolled by autocrats like Erdogan and like Putin without getting a thing in return.

It has been nearly 2 months since the President announced the withdrawal of U.S. troops, and we still don't know what comes next. We all know that a small band of terrorists far away is more than capable of inflicting great damage on our shores, and the intelligence assessments have now confirmed that ISIS has been able to strengthen its ability to do just that.

President Trump, what is your plan to defeat ISIS and protect the United States?

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, on the NDAA, the Defense authorization bill, the annual Defense bill, which passed this Chamber months ago, has been stalled in the process of reconciling the Senate's version with the House's version.

One of the snags, it now appears, is the Republican leader's unwillingness to include a strong package of sanctions directed at any foreign nation that should try to interfere in our elections. That is right. One of the reasons the national defense bill has not been sent to the President's desk is because Majority Leader McConnell and his Republican colleagues do not want to include a strong deterrent to interfering in American elections.

Earlier this month, all leading U.S. national security officials—Attorney General Barr, Secretary of Defense Esper, Acting Secretary of Homeland Security McAleenan, Acting Director of National Intelligence Maguire, FBI Director Wray, and U.S. Cyber Command Commander Nakasone—released a statement that read the following:

Our adversaries want to undermine our democratic institutions, influence public sentiment and affect government policies. Russia, China, Iran, and other foreign malicious actors all will seek to interfere in the voting process or influence voter perceptions.

Those are not my words. They are from the leaders of this administration, including the Secretaries of Defense and State and the head of the NSA.

We know that Putin interfered in the 2016 elections. We know he is trying to do it again. That is clear. We need to send an unmistakable message to President Putin and other foreign actors—China and Iran—that we will not tolerate any interference in our elections.

Unfortunately, Leader McConnell seems to have missed that memo. How he could ignore a statement by the leaders of the administration he supports is beyond me. The Republican leader has repeatedly downplayed the threat to our democracy from foreign actors like President Putin. He has repeatedly blocked commonsense, bipartisan legislation to protect our elections and is now blocking the inclusion of tough, mandatory sanctions on Russia or on any other foreign country that seeks to interfere in our elections.

I hope, for the sake of the Defense bill and for the sake of our elections, the Republican leader will relent and allow a package of tough sanctions to be included.

Unfortunately, election security is not the only issue holding up the Defense bill. The Republican leader is blocking many other important provisions.

The Democrats want to extend family leave benefits to all Federal employees. The majority leader and the Republicans are blocking that. This is a new world. Family leave is necessary to everyone. Here we have a chance to do it for Federal workers, and our Republican friends are saying no.

The Democrats want to clean up our communities and military installations that have been poisoned by PFAS and other contaminants, but the majority leader and our friends, the Republicans here in the Senate, are blocking that.

The Democrats want to send a signal to the Trump administration that it does not have a blank check to wage a war and that only Congress can approve major military operations. Majority Leader McConnell and the Republicans are blocking that as well.

There are hosts of important issues that are holding up the final passage of the national defense bill. These are just a few of them. I strongly urge my Republican friends and, especially, Republican Leader McConnell to work with us to address these provisions. The Democrats want to see that this bill gets done and that it gets done in a way that safeguards our elections, our troops, our communities, and advances America's interests around the globe.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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