

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we are nearing the halfway point of the 117th Congress, and it is time to look back and see what our Democratic colleagues now in the majority have accomplished.

Unfortunately, we have seen a lot of wasted valuable time and ignoring of critical tasks and failing to meet some of the most basic requirements of government. Our colleagues used the first few months of the year to ram through a partisan \$2 trillion spending bill, and then they wasted the summer on the majority leader's designed-to-fail agenda.

It wasn't about actually getting anything done. It was about messaging. And then they threw it in cruise control this fall, refusing to let the Senate vote on anything other than low-level nominees and, again, those messaging bills.

Well, unsurprisingly, this partisan approach to governing—despite the fact that we have an evenly divided Senate and perhaps an evenly divided government, this partisan approach, unsurprisingly, did not lead to any good results.

One of the biggest unforced errors in this tardiness so far has been the national defense authorization bill. Now, I happen to believe that providing for the common defense and supporting our men and women in the military, keeping the American people safe, protecting our freedoms is the most important work that we do here. And, indeed, that is reflected by the fact that the National Defense Authorization Act has been passed for 60 years, I believe it is—60 consecutive years.

Well, this is not a particularly controversial bill. In fact, it came out of the Armed Services Committee with an impressive 23-to-3 vote. You have to look long and hard to find any bill that passes the Senate that enjoys as much bipartisan support.

For some unknown reason, though, the Democratic leader refused to bring the Defense authorization bill to the floor. But then when he finally did, after it had been sitting around waiting for action for literally months, then he attached a controversial provision—a bill, the so-called Endless Frontiers Act, which had not been processed by the House, but in an attempt to force the House to take that bill.

Well, as it turned out, after broad bipartisan support for the Defense authorization bill, he couldn't get the votes here in the Senate to advance that bill, so he had to basically pull it down. Well, when you try to add something as big as the Endless Frontiers bill that did pass the Senate to a bipartisan Defense appropriations bill, that created a lot of problems.

So you can't sit on a bill for months and then at the last moment try to jam another bill onto it without at least giving people an opportunity for a robust debate and amendment process. And, as we know, during the time that

I have been here, and I am sure during the time that the Presiding Officer has been here, we have less and less of that robust debate and less and less of actually offering and voting on amendments on the Senate floor. It is very different from the time I came here, when it was commonplace.

So I am disappointed that it has taken the leader this long to bring the NDAA to the floor and that, so far, we have been thwarted in our attempt to get this bipartisan bill done. I hear rumors that, in fact, there may be a bill being preconferenced with the House. So my hope is we will get a chance to vote on this bill in the coming days.

Of course, as I indicated, this legislation sends critical support to our servicemembers and their families and ensures that our military bases in Texas, Connecticut, and elsewhere have the funding they need to support the missions they serve in around the world.

But it also provides the military the means to take stock in the global threat landscape. Since 9/11, we have been very focused on the terrorism threat. Unfortunately, at the same time, we have seen China and Russia continue to assert themselves more aggressively around the world. So now we are in the so-called "great powers competition" once again, and it is critical that we have this tool known as deterrence that only comes through strength.

Passing this bill and providing the resources and authorities needed for our military are essential to providing that strength, which will lead, hopefully, to deterrence and greater peace.

So the NDAA, as I said, is one of the most important assignments that we have, and there is simply no excuse for leaving this in the cleanup pile to be done between now and Christmas. But having said that, I hope we do get it done.

As I said, there are other past-due assignments—something as basic as funding the functions of the government through passing 12 separate appropriations bills that go through a committee process and are open to amendment in the committee.

Congress's deadline to pass the funding bills doesn't pop up out of nowhere. It hits the same day every year. Back in September, when the Senate should have passed a group of those appropriation bills to fund the government for the next fiscal year, our colleagues on the other side, led by the Democratic leader, kicked the can down the road for 2 months. Rather than use that time to play catch-up and pass those annual appropriations bills, they simply lollygagged.

The funding deadline came last week, and what happened?

Well, there was another continuing resolution. They kicked the can down the road yet once again.

This year, our colleagues have found the time to vote on partisan, dead-on-arrival messaging bills, but they have yet to bring a single appropriations bill

to the floor for a vote. We will see if that changes before February, when the current continuing resolution runs out.

Then there is another assignment that our colleagues have ignored for months, and that is the debt ceiling. While they are more than happy to spend money like they did at the first part of this year—another \$2 trillion—and add to the national debt and plan to spend at least another—anywhere from probably close to \$4.5 trillion additional more money on the Build Back Better program—I know it has been advertised as \$1.7 trillion, but outside entities like the Wharton business school at the University of Pennsylvania have said that if you ignore the stops and starts that are set up in the bill as gimmicks that make it scoreless and if you actually extend the bill for the full 10-year budget window, it really is spending closer to \$4.8 trillion.

We are trying to get the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation to give us a realistic score. But if you see this \$2 trillion spent at the beginning of the year with another anticipated potential up to 4.5, 4.8, \$5 trillion, you can see why raising the debt limit is so critical. The Treasury Secretary said that we will hit the debt limit by December 15, just a week from tomorrow.

Again, this crisis did not just pop up out of nowhere. Since July, the Republican leader has told our friends across the aisle that they need to raise the debt ceiling on their own.

Some have asked: Why do we insist that Democrats raise the debt ceiling on their own when ordinarily this is a bipartisan effort?

Well, part of this is just a necessary political accountability. If our colleagues are going to spend trillions of dollars in borrowed money and add to the debt ceiling, at some point there has to be some transparency and electoral accountability.

I am told now that Senator SCHUMER and Senator MCCONNELL have agreed on a process that will allow our Democratic colleagues to fulfill their responsibilities to raise the debt ceiling on their own and to suffer the accountability that goes along with it.

All along there was a clear roadmap that could have avoided this confusion if our colleagues had simply used the budget reconciliation process. Debt ceilings are routinely raised using the reconciliation process. There is no problem with the Byrd bath or any other concerns. It is something that is written into the Budget Act of 1974 that they could have done on their own earlier, but by delaying here to the last minute, when Secretary Yellen says we are going to hit the debt ceiling here by the 15th of December, they have created another crisis—again, of their own making.

The reason our colleagues have essentially failed at the fundamentals of governing over this last year is that they have been distracted by their own

partisan ambitions. Again, you would think, after the election of 2020—when you have an evenly divided Senate wherein the Vice President is the one who breaks ties and actually determines, because of that, who is in the majority and who is in the minority—that it would council up some bipartisan consensus-making when the Senate is split, essentially, evenly.

Instead, we have seen one of the most aggressive, radical agendas that we have seen since I have been in the Senate, and not surprisingly, our Democratic colleagues have had trouble convincing even Members of their own caucus to go along with it.

The Build Back Better program—or what I would call “Build Back Bankrupt”—is a bill that gives millionaires and billionaires massive tax breaks. Strangely, from the party that claims to be representing the working class and the middle class of the country, they want to prioritize the tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires while forcing middle-class families, who can’t afford to buy expensive electric cars, to subsidize these fancy cars driven by others who can afford them.

Our colleagues say the spending spree will cost taxpayers about \$2 trillion, which, of course, is hardly a bargain to begin with. I remember when a billion dollars used to be a lot of money around here, and now trillions of dollars are casually tossed around like it is an insignificant—or not as serious—a matter as it is.

Yet we know the spending spree—as I said, the “Build Back Bankrupt” or “Build Back Broke,” whatever you want to call it, or “Build Back Bad,” and there are other names you can give it—could cost as much as \$5 trillion, as I said, which is more than 2½ times what has been advertised.

We started at \$6 trillion from the chairman of the Budget Committee, Senator SANDERS. Then it was paired down, supposedly, to \$3.5 trillion, and then to \$1.75 trillion. The only way that was done was to propose a piece of legislation that was chock-full of gimmicks and cliffs and phony, false starts in programs that will, in all likelihood, be continued should our Democratic colleagues stay in the majority or achieve a true majority.

This multitrillion-dollar bill will drive up energy costs. We have already seen inflation eating away at the income of working families. When you go fill up your gas tank at the gas station or when you sit down to Thanksgiving dinner, everything is more expensive now because of inflation, making it even tougher for Texas families, among others, to make ends meet.

Of course, then, there is the President’s falsely representing the cost of this piece of legislation—actually having the temerity to say that this costs zero. I don’t know what he takes the American people for, but they are not stupid. They understand that, when somebody stands up there and says we are going to do something that has

been scored to the trillions of dollars and that it is going to cost zero, it really is an insult to their intelligence.

For the past several months, our colleagues have devoted almost all of their energy to this “Build Back Bankrupt” plan and, of course, in the process, have failed to meet any of the most basic responsibilities of governing. Now that it is finals season and we are running out of time before the Christmas holidays, they are trying to salvage their poor performance of accomplishment this year.

Our colleagues are quick to point the finger and blame Republicans for the Senate’s failures, but Republicans aren’t the ones setting the schedule, and, frankly, the message being sent from the Democratic side of the aisle is: We don’t want to work with Republicans; we want to do this all by ourselves.

If they get the votes, they can, but they are having some difficulties now—particularly on the “Build Back Broke” plan—of even getting Democrats to vote for it. I, actually, think our colleagues from West Virginia and Arizona are doing some of their Democratic colleagues a favor because, I dare say, there are other Members of the Democratic caucus who are going to be on the ballot in 2022, who would prefer not to vote on some of these very controversial provisions.

Our colleagues, though, do control the Senate, the House, and the White House, and every aspect of the legislative process is under their control. So they bear responsibility for the delay in the Defense authorization bill; they bear responsibility for not passing regular appropriations; and they bear responsibility for the concerns that have been expressed by reaching the debt limit, as Secretary Yellen has said, and then, finally, by trying to pass through the House this reckless tax-and-spending spree bill—Build Back Better, “Build Back Broke,” “Build Back Bankrupt”—by focusing so much on these pieces of legislation that will, in my estimation, never pass or certainly not in their current forms.

In ignoring their other basic responsibilities of governing, they are the ones who, ultimately, will get this report card for their performance during the first year of their majority.

So, in being presented with this reality of an evenly split Congress, our colleagues can make a choice as to whether to try to work together and build consensus and do things that can actually pass or to continue down this pathway of purely partisan attempts to legislate. The choice is theirs.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I rise today to urge my colleagues to confirm several highly qualified nominees who are waiting to get to work in critical roles across the government.

Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate consider the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 404, Rupa Ranga Puttagunta, of the District of Columbia, to be Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for the term of fifteen years; that the nomination be confirmed; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order on the nomination; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, in reserving the right to object, throughout his Presidency, Joe Biden and his administration have shown a complete and total inability to place qualified and competent people in positions of power across the Federal Government. We have had crisis after crisis due to the failed leadership of President Biden and his appointees. I have absolutely no faith that Joe Biden’s radical, far-left nominees will uphold the rule of law.

I cannot and will not consent to allowing these nominees to move forward in an expedited manner. We should take a vote so every Senator can get on the record with their support or opposition to each of these nominees.

Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order to make the same request with respect to Executive Calendar No. 406, Kenia Seoane Lopez, of the District of Columbia, to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for the term of fifteen years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order to make the same request with respect to Executive Calendar No. 410, Sean C. Staples, of the District of Columbia, to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for the term of fifteen years.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that it be in order to make the same request with respect to Executive Calendar No. 556, Ebony M. Scott, of the District of Columbia, to be an Associate Judge of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia for the term of fifteen years.