

[L]ook at my eyes. I guarantee you . . . we are going to end—

End—
fossil fuel.

Now, President Biden spent 2 years campaigning on hostility to American energy. Now he has spent 14 months putting that hostility right into action, and Democrats' reckless spending that has fueled across-the-board inflation has made Americans' pain at the pump even worse.

But in the last few days, the Biden administration has tried to invent some laugh-out-loud—laugh-out-loud—revisionist history. They are trying to rebrand the entire increase in gas prices on their watch—listen to this—as an effect of Putin's recent invasion of Ukraine. So they want to blame 14 months of gas price increases on the last 2 weeks of turmoil.

Washington Democrats' war on domestic energy long, long predates Putin's war on Ukraine. So let me say that again. Democrats' war on domestic energy long predates Putin's war on Ukraine.

Now, I strongly support America stopping our purchases of Putin's oil, but Democrats' 14-month war on our own production will make that necessary action more painful for American families than it had to be. If the Biden administration had spent 14 months promoting American energy instead of attacking our production and fueling inflation, we would be better positioned to push back on Putin at a less painful cost to American families.

The President's team wants to pretend this lengthy problem only started 2 weeks ago, but American families have been paying for Democrats' bad policies for a lot longer than that.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, yesterday, the House passed a bipartisan, bicameral government funding agreement that will enable crucial investments in our national defense. Putin's war on Ukraine is just one manifestation of the major long-term threats to American security and American interests posed by major competing powers like Russia and China.

So, absolutely, we must rapidly fund the urgent assistance that Ukraine and our allies along NATO's eastern flank need right now, but we must also make the investments in military modernization that will equip America to achieve peace through strength for years and decades to come.

Our military commanders have clearly and consistently told us they cannot rebuild and modernize our military to meet the growing threats if Congress lets defense funding sleepwalk from one continuing resolution to another. The world is a dangerous place. It is growing more dangerous every day. The road to peace runs through American power. We all know it is true, so we have to budget accordingly.

Our recent negotiations put us Republicans in the surreal position of having to push a Commander in Chief's party into giving his own commanders the funding they need. But, over many Democrats' objections, Republicans made sure this deal gets the job done for our Armed Forces.

The compromise product provides significantly more money than the Biden administration had requested for defense and significantly less than they requested for nondefense.

Until 24 hours ago, this compromise was also going to reprogram money away from Democrats' wasteful spending spree that neglected COVID needs and reallocate it to vaccines and treatment for the American people, but House Democrats mutinied against Speaker PELOSI. The far left would rather preserve State and local bureaucrats' giant slush funds than fund vaccines and therapeutics for our citizens, so the COVID component has fallen out.

Overall, this agreement checks the three boxes I laid out months ago. The bill maintains parity between defense and nondefense spending growth. It maintains longstanding bipartisan policies, such as protecting taxpayers against funding abortions and being politically targeted by the IRS. And new far-left poison pills were cut out. But more urgently, amidst this war in Europe, this agreement delivers aid the Ukrainians need right now and a downpayment on our commitment to keep defending America and global peace in the years to come.

UKRAINE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, over the last few days, the Biden administration's confusing mismanagement and mixed signals surrounding the Ukraine crisis and the West's response have again spilled out into open public view.

Here is the pattern. Time and time again throughout this crisis and in the months preceding it, the administration's first instinct has been to resist strong and decisive steps. The President and his team initially take a pass on strong steps when they could have been put into place proactively and had a real deterrent effect, but then, after sustained public pressure, they buckle and implement the steps anyway, often too late. This "leading from behind" leaves us in a lose-lose scenario.

The pattern has played out yet again with this bizarre argument over MiG airplanes that President Biden's team has carried out in public with our Polish allies.

The mere fact that Biden administration officials are contradicting not only each other but also our NATO allies in public like this evidences a severe lack of the coordination and proactive leadership that we should be—us, Americans—should be providing. This isn't limited to just these Polish planes; there are all manner of

different systems, tools, and arms that our eastern flank allies and partners could be providing more readily to the brave Ukrainians. This would take American leadership and coordination and an American commitment that we will help them replace their Soviet-era stocks with American and Western military technology.

The loan guarantees we included in the supplemental appropriations bill will give the administration a tool to do just this—help eastern flank NATO partners use their own money to modernize their defensive capabilities. This would be a win for Ukraine, a win for us, and a win for NATO.

These kinds of steps should be no-brainers for a confident, assertive, and decisive American administration. Instead, it repeatedly seems like the administration's first instinct is to flinch—to flinch—wait for international and public pressure to overwhelm them, and then take action only after the most opportune moment has nearly passed us by.

Nobody wants an escalation, but if the administration keeps repeating this pattern of self-deterrence, of convincing itself that any proactive step would be irresponsible, they are just internalizing Putin's false premise and amplifying Putin's false equivalence.

Remember this: Strength is not a provocation. The world needs President Biden and his team to be leading, taking the initiative, and shaping circumstances calmly, soberly, but with confidence and decisiveness. They seem to be trapped in a cycle of passivity, indecision, self-deterrence, and then, finally, reaction. The world needs the Biden administration to be flying this plane. Too often, it feels like the plane is flying them.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RUSSIA

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, it is interesting to listen to the reaction to the notion that we are going to stop our dependence on Russian oil. I totally support that. The notion that I would buy gasoline in my hometown and put it in my car or truck and somehow subsidize what Vladimir Putin is doing in the rape of Ukraine is just unacceptable. I believe there is not only a moral force but a political force behind this. Morally, there is no way we are going to support Putin. Politically, we have to come together with other nations and make this as painful as possible on him, and stopping the import of Russian oil is a move in that direction.

It is interesting that that was a bipartisan position which I joined over the weekend—many of us did—Democrats and Republicans all saying: Enough with the Russian oil. We will find other ways to keep America's economy and cars and trucks moving without being dependent on Vladimir Putin or subsidizing his war effort.

It was bipartisan—strong statements. In fact, there were as many statements in support of this from the other side of the aisle as this side of the aisle. Then what happened? Well, Dana Milbank, in this morning's Washington Post, tells the story of what happened.

After President Biden made his announcement Tuesday, he said, accurately:

"Since Putin began his military buildup on Ukrainian borders, just since then, [it is 2 weeks] the price of gas at the pump in America went up 75 cents. And with this action [the Americans will stop buying Russian oil] it's going to go up further." [President Biden] dubbed it "Putin's price hike" and said "Russia is responsible."

Since this was a bipartisan idea—stopping the flow of Russian oil into the United States and subsidizing Putin's invasion of Ukraine—you would think there would be bipartisan applause. The exact opposite occurred.

In a Dana Milbank article, which I will ask to be part of the RECORD, here is what was said by House Republican Leader KEVIN MCCARTHY:

"These aren't Putin prices. They're President Biden's prices" . . . "Gas prices started rising the day President Biden took office—when he canceled the Keystone Pipeline and halted new drilling on federal lands."

It turns out that these assertions, by not just KEVIN MCCARTHY but other Republican leaders, are just not accurate. Nobody goes to the task and assignment of actually backing up some of these facts like real history and real numbers.

Here is what he says: Gas prices started rising on the day that Biden took office.

Wrong.

They have been on an upward trend since bottoming out in April 2020, at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. This is because of booming demand during the recovery. So this notion that these are Biden gas prices that just started going up magically after he was sworn—not true.

Then I love this one on the Keystone XL Pipeline. How many times have you heard on the floor of the Senate—maybe even this morning—that canceling the Keystone Pipeline is the reason that gasoline prices have gone up?

It turns out, according to Dana Milbank, that pipeline was only 10 percent completed when Biden canceled it. Its owners didn't even expect to open it until next year, 2023, at the earliest.

Well, how about this one? You hear this over and over again from so many Republicans: Biden halted new drilling on Federal lands, they say. According to Milbank:

Wrong. After a temporary halt in new leases, Biden has outpaced Trump in new drilling permits for public lands.

That has been reported by the Washington Post.

And as for Biden's shutdown of American energy, listen to this:

U.S. production has increased under Biden from 9.7 million barrels a day to 11.6 million barrels. The number of oil rigs operating was 172 in July of 2020. . . . Now, 519 are in operation. U.S. production is forecast to set a record next year.

Now, I don't doubt that stopping the Russian export of oil into the United States is going to have a negative impact on gasoline prices. It stands to reason. But there is an adjustment being made. The President spoke to it last night, at a meeting we attended, where he is working on other sources for America to make this hardship as little as possible.

I ask unanimous consent that the Milbank article be printed in the RECORD.

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

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post]

BIDEN HEEDED REPUBLICANS' PLEAS TO BAN
RUSSIAN OIL. THEN THEY POUNCED
(By Dana Milbank)

A cynic is rarely disappointed by this Republican Party. Yet even by that standard, the current attempt to blame President Biden—and absolve Vladimir Putin—for the spike in gas prices is a special case.

For days, Republicans called for a ban on imports of Russian oil, a move that, while the right thing to do to counter Putin's attack against Ukraine, would cause already high gas prices to rise even further. Biden did as Republicans wanted—and they responded by blaming his energy policies for spiking gas prices.

It's not only that the charge is bogus—the current price of gas has virtually nothing to do with Biden's energy policies—but that the Republican officials leveling it are sowing division at home and giving a rhetorical boost to the enemy at a perilous moment when national unity and sacrifice will be needed to prevail against Russia.

Announcing the ban on Tuesday, Biden said, accurately: "Since Putin began his military buildup on Ukrainian borders, just since then, the price of the gas at the pump in America went up 75 cents. And with this action, it's going to go up further." He dubbed it "Putin's price hike" and said "Russia is responsible."

REPUBLICANS LEAPED TO PUTIN'S DEFENSE

"These aren't Putin prices. They're President Biden's prices," House GOP leader Kevin McCarthy said during a news conference on Wednesday. Via tweet, he claimed: "Gas prices started rising the day President Biden took office—when he canceled the Keystone Pipeline and halted new drilling on federal lands."

Rep. Elise Stefanik (N.Y.), head of the House Republican Conference, added: "Joe Biden blames Russia for skyrocketing gas prices. But make no mistake—Biden's war on American energy is to blame."

Scores of Republicans piled on. The GOP side of the House Energy and Commerce Committee tweeted: "Russia isn't 'responsible'. Biden's shutdown of American energy is."

That's just a gusher of mendacity.

Gas prices "started rising the day President Biden took office"? Wrong. They've

been on an upward trend since bottoming out in April 2020 at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. This is because of booming demand during the recovery—not because of Biden's policies (or President Donald Trump's, for that matter).

Canceling the Keystone XL pipeline caused gas prices to rise? Wrong. It was only 10 percent done when Biden canceled it, and its owners didn't expect to open it until 2023 at the earliest.

Biden "halted new drilling on federal lands"? Wrong. After a temporary halt in new leases, Biden has outpaced Trump in new drilling permits for public lands, The Post reported.

As for Biden's "shutdown of American energy," U.S. production has increased under Biden from 9.7 million barrels a day to 11.6 million barrels. The number of oil rigs operating was at 172 in July 2020, E&E News reports. Now, 519 are in operation. U.S. production is forecast to set a record next year.

What's holding back oil production isn't government policy. U.S. producers still have 4,400 wells already approved and drilled that are not yet producing. They aren't drilling more because of a shortage of workers and equipment and, particularly, investors' greed. As The Post reported, major U.S. oil companies say they would rather use their profits "to boost payouts to shareholders" than "rush to drill new wells."

Blaming Biden for the spike in prices around Russia's Ukraine invasion isn't just false—it's an assist to Putin that damages national security.

Polls show that Americans—Republicans and Democrats alike—favor banning Russian oil imports, even if that increases energy prices. Seventy-nine percent said so in a Wall Street Journal poll this week. Americans know the stakes, and they are willing to sacrifice.

But what happens if Republican lawmakers and their Fox News masters persuade their supporters to believe that Biden, not Putin, is to blame for their problems? Their willingness to sacrifice dissipates—and so does their support for the fight against Putin.

It's lucky this hasn't happened already. Fox News's Tucker Carlson, after parroting Kremlin talking points justifying its invasion of Ukraine, has pivoted to blaming the United States for provoking Putin. "Why in the world would the United States intentionally seek war with Russia?" he asked on Monday night.

Trump himself has praised Putin's acuity. Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) has called for the United States to appease Russia by abandoning its support for Ukrainian membership in NATO, and Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.), after proposing to impeach Biden for "threatening war" with Russia, now asks: "How is banning Russian oil (10 percent of our imports) helping reduce gas prices hurting Americans?"

Fighting Russian aggression while avoiding World War III is hard enough. With Republicans acting in bad faith, it's that much harder.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, finally, an omnibus spending bill. For months, there have been negotiations underway. The process has been drawn out. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, there was a lot of frustration. But soon we are going to vote on an omnibus spending package, and we are going to do much more than keep the lights on in our government.

In many ways, this spending package is a testament to the progress we have