

Monday, the White House scuttled a bipartisan congressional bill to end normal trade relations with Russia, only to make a public show on Friday of calling for exactly the same action.

At every step of the way—every step of the way—the self-deterred White House has insisted its hesitation and restraint was aimed at avoiding escalation, but at every step, Putin has escalated.

Now, 3 weeks into Putin's invasion, the reality on the ground is evolving. It is harder now than it would have been a few months ago to keep the pipeline of weapons and supplies and intelligence for Ukraine's brave resistance open. Russia's air offensive in particular is hitting a deadlier, more aggressive stride. But, as I have been saying literally for months, it is not too late for the Biden administration to do the right thing. So here is what President Biden should be doing right now:

No. 1, he should use the money and authorities we have just provided him to expand the scope of our lethal aid to Ukraine to include more effective, longer range air defense capabilities. That means working with NATO allies with urgency to get Ukrainian pilots more aircraft and munitions and facilitating the transfer of weapons Ukraine's forces are most familiar with, like air defense systems from countries with stockpiles of Soviet legacy systems. President Zelenskyy specifically pleaded for these air defense systems this morning—this morning.

No. 2, President Biden should deploy more U.S. forces to reinforce NATO's eastern flank and use the new draw-down and loan guarantee authorities to help harden the defenses of our front-line allies and partners. Many of these partners are generously helping Ukraine, and we should help them backfill their inventories with more modern American capabilities that will improve NATO's interoperability and bolster deterrence at the same time.

No. 3, on a trip to Europe next week, President Biden should go beyond Brussels. He should go to countries like Poland, Romania, or Lithuania to meet with NATO eastern flank allies. He should look beyond NATO to deepen our diplomatic security cooperation with important American partners like Finland and Sweden.

Finally, if President Biden wants the United States to lead our allies by example and to keep pace with adversaries like Russia and China, the place to start is with robust investments in our own defense capabilities. The coming year's appropriations process is an opportunity to finally—finally—show we are serious.

Vladimir Putin has proven to the world that he is willing to stoop low in pursuit of power, and he has shown us exactly—exactly—how he responds to weakness. We cannot afford to stay behind the curve. America must lead and lead with strength.

A few minutes ago, President Zelenskyy reminded us that the United

States is, indeed, the leader of the free world, so it is time we acted like it.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. President, on another matter, last week marked 1 year since Democrats rammed \$2 trillion of runaway liberal spending through the Senate on a party-line vote. Working families were certainly not celebrating this particular anniversary; they were too busy contending with the worst inflation in modern American history, unleashed in large part by that very bill.

Democrats' policies have conjured up the worst inflation in 40 years. Consumer prices rose 0.8 percent in the month of February alone. Annual inflation hit 7.9 percent. It is still getting worse. We just learned yesterday that the Producer Price Index, which measures inflation upstream at the wholesale level, is up 10 percent—10 percent—since last year.

This is hammering American families. Experts estimate that inflation alone is costing the average household more than \$296 every single month—the equivalent of an extra \$300 monthly bill courtesy of Democratic policies. No wonder almost 60 percent of Americans say inflation is causing them personal financial pain and the Democrats' approval ratings on the economy are way underwater. Even with a literal land war in Europe, the Democrats' inflation is so painful that inflation and not Ukraine still tops the American people's biggest list of concerns.

From the gas pump to the grocery store, to clothes, diapers, and baby formula, to furniture and home essentials, to car repairs and car replacements, Democrats' policies have put working families on a treadmill where they have to run faster and faster every month just to stay in place. Rent prices are spiking faster than they have since 1991. Grocery prices are soaring faster than they have since 1981. New cars and truck prices are climbing at their fastest rates ever. Forget about getting ahead and saving—households are lucky if they are even able to tread water.

Lately, Democrats have launched a shameless campaign to blame 12 months of inflation not on 12 months of their bad policies but instead on the last 3 weeks' crisis in Europe. The White House informs us that "Putin's price hike" is the culprit. Of course, that is utter nonsense. Even liberal experts are rejecting their shameless spin.

A former top economist for President Obama directly responded to the Biden administration's attempt to shift the blame. He said:

Well—

This is what he said—

Well, no. These are February numbers and only include [a] small Russia effect. This is Biden's inflation and he needs to own it.

The White House spin has not even persuaded former Democratic officials. Here is another quote:

This is Biden's inflation and he needs to own it.

Working Americans understand it just as well as the experts. Everybody knows where the buck stops. One retired mechanic who lives in Los Angeles recently explained to a reporter that he is facing \$6 gasoline and rising food prices. He is a registered Democrat, but he knows where this inflation came from. Here is how he described it. He said:

Uncle Joe has put us on a diet. I like to have a steak once or twice a month. I can't do it now.

This is exactly what Republicans said would happen when Democrats dumped trillions of dollars into printing and spending on a partisan basis last year. Even top liberal economists said Democrats' reckless spending spree would bring about inflationary pressures like we have not seen for a generation.

Ah, but Democrats didn't listen. They pushed ahead, and, for 12 months and counting, working families have been paying a heavy price.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the Republican leader referred to the American Rescue Plan, which did not receive a single Republican vote in support. He referred to it as runaway Federal spending.

What did we buy with the American Rescue Plan?

We bought vaccines, and we bought an administration and management of delivering those vaccines to the American people in the midst of a pandemic that was claiming American lives every day.

Runaway Federal spending—how much stronger would this Nation be if we were still in the depths of this pandemic?

We are emerging from it, thank God. But it wasn't for lack of effort on our part on this side of the aisle.

Yes, we spent the money. We administered the shots, and people across America are now protected from hospitalizations and death because of it. No apologies here to my colleague from Kentucky. It was money well spent, not just for that—and that was the number one public health purpose—but, secondly, to keep businesses afloat so they can reopen their doors as the pandemic ebbed.

That investment in the capital of America, in the businesses of America, paid off for business owners who otherwise would have lost their life savings and family investments and for their workers who finally returned to work.

I think it helped the small businesses, and I think it helped the families. The child tax credit, which cut in half child poverty in America—that child tax credit, according to the Senator from Kentucky, was runaway Federal spending. Tell that to the family who lives paycheck to paycheck and tries to provide the basics in life for their children. No apologies here for the American Rescue Plan.

And when you ask the American people, “What about this inflation,” it is a problem. Of course, it is. We see it as they do. And we see it all across the world. Inflation isn’t confined to the United States. It is reflected in a world that is emerging from COVID-19, where economies—local economies—were strangled and choked and restricted. Now, they are expanding. People are expanding their needs and spending on that side of it. If the supply doesn’t keep up with it, then inflation results. We have a battle ahead of us and many plans here to try to address it with a number of items to reduce the cost of living for families.

UKRAINE

Mr. President, the second item I would like to mention refers to a moving, historic presentation this morning by the President of Ukraine to a joint session of Congress.

He did it virtually by remote because he is literally in Kyiv, risking his life every single day for his nation.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy may have started his life as a standup comedian, but at this moment in life, he is a standup President of Ukraine, who is confronting the monster of Moscow who has unleashed this invasion on his country. He begged us to continue to help, and we will.

Last week, we added almost \$14 billion to the effort to support the Ukrainian defense and resistance. We need to do that and more.

Many of the suggestions by the Republican Senator are consistent with that goal, and I would endorse it. But I want to leave it to President Biden to make the critical decisions as our Commander in Chief who is really tasked with America’s national security as his highest priority.

I take exception to this notion that Joe Biden didn’t understand the timing of this crisis. He understood it better than anyone. He knew that if he pushed too far and too fast, two things might occur: first, that the Russians would move because we had precipitated it with an action we had taken. He was hoping, as we all did, that this could be ended bloodlessly and that an innocent people would be saved from what we see, the devastation that is happening in Ukraine today. So he was careful to make those moves in a way that Putin couldn’t use them as an excuse for starting the invasion.

Second, and more important, he needed to move at a pace consistent with building the NATO alliance. President Joe Biden succeeded in that effort. The NATO alliance today is stronger than it has ever been. Don’t believe the last President of the United States had anything to do with that, just the opposite was true.

Joe Biden picked up that alliance from the mat and brought them up to fighting trim, to be ready, if needed, to “defend every square inch,” as he says, “of NATO territory.” That timing was crucial. And decisions which seem so easy and obvious in America were

much more complex on the continent of Europe. Joe Biden knew that, and he paced himself accordingly. And because of that today, we have the strongest alliance in the face of Vladimir Putin that he has ever seen and that we have ever seen.

The last point I want to make to this, you could not watch the graphic video presented by President Zelenskyy without breaking your heart. Every parent and grandparent in America watching that video saw a member of his family, a child, a lifeless corpse because of a man named Vladimir Putin and what he is doing to that poor country. Unprovoked, he has invaded them and kills innocent people every single day.

Last night, unanimously, the Senate decided, as they should, that the conduct of Vladimir Putin was nothing short of a war crime. I can’t think of any other way to describe it and certainly never excuse it.

Zelenskyy touched our hearts too. His people are fighting a valiant effort, and the United States and allies and countries that share our values stand behind him and will continue to.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2022

Mr. President, I am honored to join my colleagues Senators MURKOWSKI and ERNST and, of course, my friend and colleague Senator FEINSTEIN to celebrate the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, more commonly known as VAWA. Yesterday, President Biden signed it into law. This is a monumental achievement for the survivors of domestic sexual violence and those who stand by them.

It is an achievement that wouldn’t have been possible without bipartisan cooperation. It, literally, would not have been possible. I have been proud to work with my three colleagues whom I mentioned.

With this strengthened version of VAWA, we have helped to ensure that every survivor in America, no matter where they live, will be able to reach for a lifeline in a moment of crisis. We have expanded and authorized services for rural survivors, survivors who need culturally specific services, and LGBTQ survivors. We have reauthorized programs that ensure survivors and their families can access housing, healthcare, and essential support services. We have improved rape prevention and education, as well as services and protections for young survivors. We have enhanced critical protections for Native American women and children who experience violence at the hands of non-Native perpetrators.

It doesn’t include everything we had hoped for. That is the nature of legislation and compromise. I wish there had been stronger protections for housing and economic assistance, but we had to find an agreement, and we did.

The bill contains several important provisions to help boost enforcement of our gun laws. I wish it would have finally closed the so-called “boyfriend

loophole,” but that was beyond our reach in this effort.

The lack of those provisions could not attract enough bipartisan support in the Senate to pass on their own. They will be saved for another day.

For nearly 30 years, VAWA has transformed the way we address domestic and sexual violence in America and saved countless lives. At a moment when nearly one in three women—one in three—have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence, a crisis that has grown worse during the pandemic, VAWA is going to help save lives.

Let me tell you a story. My office received a letter from a woman named Kesha, who works with Connections for Abused Women and their Children in Chicago. Kesha told me that VAWA provides funding for domestic violence services at Chicago’s Haymarket Center, an amazing agency I know full well.

She shared the story of Cassandra, who was receiving treatment at the Center for Substance Abuse and disclosed to a counselor that she was the victim of abusive treatment. Her counselor referred her to VAWA, and that program gave her an opportunity to “open up about the emotional, financial, and physical abuse she had suffered for years at the hands of [an] abusive husband.”

Kesha wrote:

After weeks of domestic violence psychoeducation, a supportive network encouraging her, and her own personal resilience, Cassandra decided that if she wanted to remain in recovery and not relapse, [she had to find a new home, away from her abuser.] With the help of her domestic violence counselor, Cassandra was able to break free and transition into temporary housing.

She has been able to gain financial independence and find a job. She has remained on her path to recovery, a success story, and a reminder that VAWA doesn’t just help save lives, it gives survivors the power to rebuild their own lives.

VAWA also provides funding for educational programming, and it has done it so well.

I want to thank Senator FEINSTEIN, Senator ERNST, and Senator MURKOWSKI for their partnership and tireless leadership in getting this bill addressed, introduced, and across the finish line.

I want to thank their staff: Jessica Jensen, Senator FEINSTEIN’s chief counsel, as well as Nick Xenakis, her former chief counsel; Corey Becker and Kristina Sesek, Senator ERNST’s legislative director and general counsel; and Anna Dietderich, Senator MURKOWSKI’s legislative assistant.

On my Judiciary Committee staff, I would like to give thanks especially to Stephanie Trifone and Nicole McClain Walton and Chastidy Burns.

I want to thank the other members of the committees of jurisdiction and their staffs, along with Ranking Member MURKOWSKI and the minority staff on the Indian Affairs Committee,