



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 168

WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2022

No. 75

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Friday, May 6, 2022, at 10 a.m.

Senate

THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2022

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our refuge and strength, a very present help during turbulent times, thank You for setting stars of hope in life's sky, enabling us in the darkness to behold the brightness of Your grace in the firmament. Lord, we praise You that through the darkness, we see the light of Your presence that dispels the shadows. Even in the valley we know that You are with us.

Today, remind our lawmakers that human flesh is as fleeting as fading flowers and withering grass. Teach our Senators to number their days, laboring not simply for time but for eternity.

And Lord, protect the Ukrainian people.

We pray in Your powerful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination.

The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Kathryn Huff, of Illinois, to be an Assistant Secretary of Energy (Nuclear Energy).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The Senator from Vermont.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 Republican leader is recognized.

STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in Albany, NY, a grandmother of four re-

ported recently that rising prices have forced her and her husband, a retired New York police officer, to cut back on eating out. "I feel it in the pocket-book," she said.

In Grand Rapids, MI, one young family reported that, before inflation took off, "the paycheck went a little bit further." Now, on essentials like gas and groceries, "there's no wiggle room."

In Springfield, MO, a food truck owner said that he and his wife are having to take business farther and farther from home despite gas prices.

Stories like these aren't exceptions; they are the rule. Working Americans have been absolutely swamped by rising prices.

Two-thirds of Americans told one recent survey that inflation has been difficult or even a hardship for their families. Fewer than one in five says the Biden administration's policies have done anything to improve economic conditions, and yet, as we speak, with the economy already scuffling, Washington Democrats are proposing more reckless spending and the biggest tax hike in American history. For example, President Biden is considering trying to buy up his sinking approval ratings by magically waving away \$1.6 trillion in student loan obligations.

So let's put a few things into perspective.

More than a third of Americans did not pursue education beyond high school. Of the Americans who did receive additional schooling, barely one in four holds any student debt at all. In fact, an outright majority of the \$1.6 trillion in Federal student debt is held by professionals with advanced degrees.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



Printed on recycled paper.

S2343

Working people who chose to avoid taking on debt should not have to bail out high-earning doctors, lawyers, and dentists or adults who borrowed six figures for an Ivy League master's.

President Biden wants to effectively funnel money away from people who decided to learn a trade, away from people who chose community college, away from people who made tough sacrifices to actually pay off their loans in order to buy more enthusiasm from one of the Democrats' loudest and farthest left constituencies. Young liberal professionals with elite degrees and massive earning potential get a giant hand-out, and working people in rural America get the bill.

As one scholar from a left-leaning think tank puts it:

Almost a third of all student debt is owed by the wealthiest 20 percent of households [while] only 8 percent by the bottom 20 percent.

He concludes:

Student debt is concentrated among high-wealth households, and loan forgiveness is regressive whether measured by income, educational attainment, or wealth.

Even among the small slice of Americans who do have some student debt, the majority owes less than \$20,000. Ah, but the senior Senator from Massachusetts has proposed a cap that would cover debt up to 2½ times that amount. She is laser focused on giving the future lawyers and future doctors of Cambridge, MA, this massive gift before this November.

You literally have Democrat State attorneys general writing the administration, demanding the Federal government "exercise its authority to cancel federal student loan debt for every [single] borrower."

Student loan socialism would be a giant slap in the face to every family who sacrificed to save for college; to every graduate who paid their debt; to every worker who made a different career choice so they could stay debt-free.

Now, a little more than a year ago, President Biden was saying:

I don't think I have the authority to do it by signing with a pen.

Speaker PELOSI affirmed that view, saying:

People think the president . . . has the power for debt forgiveness—he does not.

Even the former general counsel at the Obama Education Department concluded:

The Executive Branch likely does not have the unilateral authority to engage in mass student debt cancellation.

But, apparently, lackluster poll numbers have the President considering breaking the law and plowing ahead anyway.

So think about this very concretely. Democrats want construction workers, police officers, and small business owners in Kentucky to effectively eat the student loans of surgeons, corporate lawyers, and people in New York City who chose to borrow \$180,000 for a mas-

ter's from the Columbia film school, with no plan whatsoever for paying it back.

In addition to making inflation even worse across the board, this jubilee for the elites would do nothing to combat runaway costs in higher education. Mindless subsidies would just make the runaway costs even worse. I would like to see one single Democrat visit the working people in Kentucky and defend this proposal with a straight face.

Democrats' policies already have working Americans facing the worst inflation in more than 40 years as well as the risk of a recession. But instead of trying to help middle-class families, Democrats are cooking up massive bailouts for Ivy League graduates. You can hardly dream up something more unfair.

UKRAINE

Mr. President, now on an entirely different matter, more than 2 months into Russia's war on Ukraine, the free world has observed a few important dynamics.

First, we saw the incredible resilience of the Ukrainian people and their resolve to win. Second, we saw how ill-prepared Putin's forces were to encounter serious resistance. But most recently, we have been reminded of what a wounded bear is able and willing to do.

The terrible destruction of Mariupol, the constant barrages of contested towns in the east, and the continuing long-range missile attacks against cities far from the front are a stark reminder of the horrific costs of this conflict that may well continue for some time.

Our brave friends in Ukraine are not out of the woods. And as I have said repeatedly, America and our allies must be willing to help them win. If the outcome of this conflict is an emboldened Russia or a fractured Ukraine, there is no question that the risks to the United States, to NATO, and to other American partners will grow.

First and foremost, that means serious, ongoing commitments to deliver more of the sorts of lethal capabilities that have sustained their resistance thus far.

The United States is rightly the leading supplier of military assistance to Ukraine's fighting forces, but to the administration's credit, they are also increasingly coordinating a growing international response.

While the preponderance of our support should focus on ensuring Ukraine has the military capability to defend itself in the months ahead, we should also contribute to the multinational economic and humanitarian support Kyiv needs. We must also make new investments in U.S. capabilities, addressing munition shortfalls and defense industrial bottlenecks to ensure that we can more rapidly produce critical weapons systems that would prove essential for Ukraine, vulnerable eastern flank allies, or our own military in the months ahead.

Obviously, there is broad bipartisan support for a robust aid package. But even a strong bipartisan vote will not mean much if we don't deliver on this promise soon.

For this reason, we cannot allow this bill to be a vessel for extraneous matters. This isn't about battling climate change; this is about helping Ukraine defeat a military aggressor on the battlefield.

Urgent assistance for Ukraine's fight must move at the speed of relevance. Every day this aid spends tied down in unrelated business here in Washington is a day it is not helping Kyiv turn the tide. If the Senate is serious about helping Ukraine win, we need to show it by passing supplemental assistance—clean, no strings attached, and soon.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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.

INFLATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, yesterday the Federal Reserve raised interest rates by half a percentage point, the biggest rate hike in 22 years. The effort is underway to stop inflation. For millions of American families who are struggling to pay their bills and afford the basics, this can't come fast enough. The U.S. economy has added nearly 1.7 million jobs this year. Consumer spending is strong, but higher costs for groceries, gas, housing, and more are straining family budgets and making people very anxious about their future.

In announcing the interest rate hike yesterday, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said the following: The biggest drivers of inflation today are higher prices caused by Russia's war on Ukraine and rising COVID cases in China, which can further disrupt supply chains. In other words, the Federal Reserve Chairman said two of the biggest drivers of inflation are really global; they are complicated; and they aren't going to be solved by America alone.

Fortunately, there are some simple solutions we can take to help families save money. Let me tell you about three of them. The first is to cut gas prices. I can't think of a single cost of living that is more visible. Every street corner in America has a sign declaring what the cost of a gallon of gasoline is, and people compare these in their mind even as they drive down the road. Some people make a hobby of it. Anyone who has filled up a gas tank in the last few months has felt the sticker shock of Mr. Putin's war on Ukraine.

President Biden has already made two changes that will reduce gas prices. A little over a month ago, he announced the United States will release 1 million barrels of oil a day from its Strategic Petroleum Reserve—in