

workers? Democrats say your financial pain is the necessary cost to make America more to the liking of the radical environmental left.

The Secretary of Energy has naively suggested that green energy will leave us in a better strategic position than fossil fuels. Well, maybe she is not aware that more than 80 percent of the world's polysilicon is made in China, and about 80 percent of America's rare earth mineral needs are met by Chinese imports as well.

This is why it is such a joke for the administration to misuse the Defense Production Act to prop up solar panel manufacturers. They will just end up subsidizing Chinese suppliers upstream.

Our stockpiles of actual military requirements, like Javelin missiles and essential munitions, are being depleted. Production of critical inputs, like energetics and solid rocket motors, is backed up months and even years. But instead of using the Defense Production Act for our Nation's defense, the President is using it to indirectly line China's pocket.

Washington Democrats are hostile to the kinds of domestic mining and drilling that we will need to produce any kind of energy here at home, even green energy.

Last year, House Democrats proposed a literal dirt tax—dirt tax—that would crush domestic minerals and rare earth mining. They are so opposed to domestic mining, including for critical and rare earth minerals, Democrats literally tried to tax—listen to this—they wanted to tax dirt. Tax dirt.

So, look, this doesn't have to be this way. The American people know exactly what we need: an all-American domestic energy strategy, crude oil responsibly drilled in America, natural gas responsibly fracked in America, and more minerals and high-tech components responsibly mined in America. Democrats have a different plan: less production and higher prices. And Americans are paying for it literally every day.

UKRAINE

Mr. President, now on a related matter, last month, by an overwhelming bipartisan margin, the Senate approved a package of urgent assistance for Ukraine. Then, over the Memorial Day State work period, our friends on the frontlines marked their 100th day of resisting the latest stab of Russian aggression.

As colleagues and I can attest from our visit with President Zelenskyy and his team in Kyiv, the people of Ukraine continue to display incredible resilience and incredible bravery. Every day, brave Ukrainian soldiers pay the ultimate sacrifice to defend the sovereignty of their democratic country. Every day, innocent Ukrainians are suffering under Russia's brutal and indiscriminate assault.

Over a hundred days of war, Ukraine's resolve has remained quite firm. Can the same be said of the West?

As Russia pumps more combat power to the front, Ukraine's soldiers need

more weapons. They need more powerful weapons, and they need longer range weapons to counter Russia's offensive forces from safety. We should not delay the provision of these life-saving capabilities.

Our objective is not to humiliate Putin but to help Ukraine defend itself. That is what should guide our decisions, not Vladimir Putin's ego. We should not be self-deterred by fears that Putin will escalate. Those most affected by the risk of escalation are the Ukrainians, and they are certainly not deterred. They are fighting for their lives, and Putin is already indiscriminately leveling their cities.

Those concerned with escalation consider what Putin will do to their cities if he is not stopped by Ukraine. But some of Ukraine's supporters here in the West have yet to learn the lesson. Some of our wealthiest NATO members have dragged their feet in greenlighting the sort of military assistance our eastern flank allies have delivered willingly and at a tremendous cost. Some eastern flank partners have also welcomed millions of Ukrainian refugees into their countries. And there is more that wealthy European countries can do to help provide military, economic, and humanitarian relief in this time of crisis.

Here at home, the Biden administration's hemming and hawing and self-deterrence has slowly, incrementally given way to a more competent policy, but it has come attached to utterly incoherent public messaging.

The Biden administration should clarify that it will continue to provide Ukraine with long-range rockets so it can defend itself—defend itself—from massive military barrages that are being fired from Ukrainian territory.

The administration should clarify whether it will provide anti-ship missiles so Ukraine can target Russian threats to Ukraine's Black Sea ports and the critical export of Ukraine's grain harvest. Putin is weaponizing global food shortages, and we can and should help the Ukrainians do something about it. Doing so will send a signal to hesitant partners that they, too, should be providing Ukraine with these critical—critical—capabilities.

But reluctance to get Ukraine what it needs is particularly baffling when you consider what a Russian victory would mean for our own national security interest. Letting a vibrant, Western-facing democracy fall into Russian control would send the price of our own security operations on the continent literally through the roof. It would put America's closest allies and trading partners one border closer to an autocratic bully. And half a world away, it would tell other bullies, like the Chinese Communist Party, that lawless conquest of their neighbors isn't just possible; it is actually permitted.

If America and our allies aren't willing to do everything we can to help Ukraine win before it is too late, we will face costly, outsized consequences quite soon.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. 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.

INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the White House has apparently decided to spend June focusing on the economy.

President Biden kicked things off with an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal entitled "My Plan for Fighting Inflation."

Before he gets to the actual "plan," though, the President spends the first half of the op-ed touting his supposed economic successes. As usual, he takes credit for the economy's recovery from COVID-related woes, even though the recovery was well underway before he became President and was a natural result of the economy reopening after COVID shutdowns.

He touts job creation figures without mentioning the fact that businesses are struggling to find workers to fill jobs. He touts the number of new small business applications in 2021 without mentioning that small business optimism is at its lowest level since April 2020 at the height of the pandemic shutdowns. And he mentions "millions of Americans getting jobs with better pay," while leaving out the fact that inflation continues to outstrip wage growth, meaning that, on average, Americans are experiencing a de facto pay cut.

In all, he spends multiple paragraphs attempting to convince Americans that the economy is thriving, which I have to think feels pretty meaningless to the millions of Americans struggling with massive increases in the cost of gas, groceries, and other everyday goods.

In fact, a poll released yesterday found that just 27 percent of Americans believe they have a good chance of improving their standard of living, and it is no wonder. The President can talk about his supposed economic achievements all he wants, but that means little to Americans who have seen their disposable income eaten up by price hikes or whose raise failed to keep even pace with the increase in the cost of living.

And, of course, the President completely omits the fact that it was his economic plans that helped create our current inflation crisis in the first place. When President Biden took office, inflation was at 1.4 percent, well within the Federal Reserve's target inflation rate of 2 percent. Today, it is at 8.3 percent, near a 40-year high.

And how did we get from there to here? In substantial part, via the President's so-called American Rescue Plan. Democrats' massive partisan spending spree flooded the economy with unnecessary government money, and the

economy overheated as a result. But that is not something the President mentions when he talks about fighting inflation.

So what is the President's so-called plan to fight inflation?

Well, after spending half the op-ed touting his supposed economic successes, the President finally gets to the plan part, and the first part of his three-part plan involves having someone else address inflation. Controlling inflation, the President says, is primarily the job of the Federal Reserve, and he is going to leave them alone to do that job.

The next part of the President's plan involves things like fixing broken supply chains and boosting the productive capacity of our economy over time.

Now, I am a big supporter of improving our supply chains, which is why I have introduced the Ocean Shipping Reform Act, which, hopefully, will pass the House of Representatives and head to the President's desk soon. But given that the President has so far demonstrated little progress in addressing supply chain challenges, I am not holding my breath waiting for the White House to take action.

I am also a big fan of boosting the productive capacity of our economy. My concern is that the President fails to give any examples of how he might actually do that. He mentions high gas prices, but instead of talking about ways to address high energy prices by unleashing American energy production, he pivots to touting his release from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, a highly temporary band aid that did next to nothing to address the cause of high gas prices, except for briefly causing their rise to what are record highs.

He also claims Congress can help by passing his clean-energy tax credits and investments—which he says would result in a \$500 decrease in utility bills for American families. First, nothing about the President's clean-energy tax credits is likely to drive down energy prices, especially in the near term, and Americans can't afford to wait.

In fact, for Americans to take advantage of some of these credits, they would need to spend more money—on an electric car, for example—which is how the administration suggests Americans deal with these historic gas prices.

And the President's claim that his energy tax credits and investments would decrease utility bills for American families by \$500 is 100 percent false.

And you don't have to take my word for it. The Washington Post Fact Checker column gave the President's claim four—four Pinocchios—a rating that the Post reserves for, and I quote, “whoppers.”

And if the President has the idea that his tax credits can somehow magically move the United States to a place that we can abandon gas and oil overnight, well, he has another thing coming. No matter how much Democrats

might wish it were otherwise, the fact of the matter is that clean energy technology has simply not advanced to the point where we can replace all traditional energy resources with renewables. And pretending—pretending that we don't need gas and oil—or discouraging American oil and gas production will only result in higher energy prices for American consumers.

If the President really wanted to reduce gas prices and “boost the productive capacity of our economy over time,” as he said in his op-ed, he would embrace American energy production, including conventional energy production.

Instead, he is doing the opposite. He continues to discourage domestic production of conventional energy sources that Americans rely on. And the result is likely to be continued high energy prices well into the future.

Finally, the President turns to the third part of his plan to fight inflation, and that is reducing the deficit. Unfortunately, it is a little hard to take the President seriously on this issue. The President touts a Congressional Budget Office prediction that the deficit will fall by \$1.7 trillion this year.

What the President doesn't mention is that the reason this year's projected deficit drop looks so substantial is because Democrats inflated the deficit last year with their American Rescue Plan spending spree. Of course, the deficit will look lower this year without a massive \$1.9 trillion piece of legislation financed entirely with deficit spending.

And I am not getting my hopes up about future deficit drops, since many Democrats still want to use reconciliation rules to force through another big, party-line Democrat spending bill. This one is \$5 trillion. If they come up with a proposal that is anything like their original Build Back Better proposal, we will undoubtedly be looking at more deficit spending.

One news outlet had this to say about President Biden's op-ed and his plan to reduce the deficit:

Is it really a ‘plan’ when the President points fingers? While the president's op-ed purports to lay out a plan for addressing inflation, a close read shows that he actually seems to be pushing the burden off on others . . .

That is a fair assessment. Unfortunately, it is pretty par for the course for President Biden. He is happy to take credit for positive economic numbers even when he had nothing to do with them, but when it comes to taking responsibility for a situation, he is frequently nowhere to be found.

He won't acknowledge that his own economic proposal, the American Rescue Plan, helped create our inflation crisis in the first place. Indeed, he largely ignored the inflation crisis until it started to become absolutely necessary for him to address it, if he wanted to survive politically.

And he has displayed a similar lack of ownership of crises on his watch. The actions he has taken to weaken

border security and immigration enforcement have helped create an unprecedented immigration crisis on the southern border.

But from the President's attitude you barely even know that there is a problem, much less one that he has a particular responsibility to address.

His hostile attitude toward American energy production helped drive up gas prices and left families struggling—struggling—to fill their cars. Yet the President is ready to push off responsibility for conventional energy production to other nations, leaving our Nation less secure and even more vulnerable to price spikes.

The President closes his op-ed by noting:

The economic policy choices we make today will determine whether a sustained recovery that benefits all Americans is possible.

Well, the President is right about that. Unfortunately, it is pretty clear that the economic policy choices that he is making are wrong.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. ROSEN). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FACT ACT OF 2021

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, today is an important day. This is the day that we are going to take up toxic exposure in the U.S. Senate. It is a day that, quite frankly, should have been two decades ago, three decades ago, five decades ago, but we are where we are.

The bill we are going to be considering is the SFC Heath Robinson Honoring Our PACT Act. This bill is the most comprehensive toxic exposure package for veterans Congress has ever considered and hopefully I can say has ever delivered. It has literally been years in the making.

I am especially proud of this bill because it addresses decades of inaction and failure by our government to do the right thing by the men and women who have served this country in uniform and stood in harm's way.

I want to thank my friend and ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, JERRY MORAN, for being able to work together across the aisle to deliver what is truly a bipartisan bill that will give veterans of all eras the benefits that they have earned but maybe even more importantly, the benefits that they deserve.

As chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, there have been few issues as important as this one is to me. It has been a top priority of mine since I first came to Congress and started hearing from veterans, their families, their advocates, and veterans service organizations about exposures