

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Michael S. Barr, of Michigan, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for the unexpired term of fourteen years from February 1, 2018, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. BLUMENTHAL), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. LEAHY), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. LUJÁN), and the Senator from New York (Mr. SCHUMER) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), and the Senator from Nebraska (Mr. SASSE).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 66, nays 27, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 247 Ex.]

YEAS—66

Baldwin	Grassley	Portman
Barrasso	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Romney
Blunt	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Booker	Hirono	Rounds
Brown	Inhofe	Sanders
Cantwell	Kaine	Schatz
Capito	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cardin	King	Shaheen
Carper	Klobuchar	Sinema
Casey	Lummis	Smith
Cassidy	Manchin	Stabenow
Collins	Markey	Tester
Coons	McConnell	Toomey
Cornyn	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murkowski	Warnock
Durbin	Murphy	Warren
Ernst	Murray	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Ossoff	Wicker
Gillibrand	Padilla	Wyden
Graham	Peters	Young

NAYS—27

Blackburn	Fischer	Marshall
Boozman	Hagerty	Paul
Braun	Hawley	Rubio
Burr	Hoeben	Scott (FL)
Cotton	Hyde-Smith	Shelby
Cramer	Johnson	Sullivan
Crapo	Kennedy	Thune
Cruz	Lankford	Tillis
Daines	Lee	Tuberville

NOT VOTING—7

Blumenthal	Moran	Schumer
Leahy	Risch	
Luján	Sasse	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOKER). The yeas are 66, the nays are 27.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Michael S. Barr, of Michigan, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for the unexpired term of fourteen years from February 1, 2018.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Virginia.

RECOGNIZING LONDON BUSINESS SCHOOL GRADUATES

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I want to thank my friend the Senator from Iowa for giving me a moment of personal privilege.

I also want to acknowledge our colleague who has been the Presiding Officer. I want to acknowledge our colleague who was presiding prior to you coming to the chair and acknowledge that it is her birthday today, a great day of celebration across Arizona and elsewhere.

Mr. President, I will only rise for a moment, and I appreciate my friend the senior Senator from Illinois being here for this. I want to acknowledge my youngest daughter, Eliza, and her fellow classmates from the London Business School—not LSE; the London Business School—where, last Wednesday, I attended their graduation. My hope is that every one of these young men and women who are going to be from across the world—the United States, the UK, Nigeria, Lebanon, Israel, India, Singapore, and a host of other countries—one, I wish them all well. I know they are going to contribute to economies and growth around the world.

I also believe that almost all of them now are going to go off their family's payroll at this moment in time after they have received this great, distinguished MBA they received from the London Business School.

I do appreciate, again, my friend the Senator from Iowa giving me the courtesy of this quick acknowledgement and recognition.

With that, I yield the floor and yield to my friend the senior Senator from Iowa.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Iowa.

WHISTLEBLOWERS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am back to the floor for reasons that my Senator friends are tired of hearing me talk about all the time, but I have come back to give you a specific example of retaliation against whistleblowers, Agencies of the government not answering letters that we have sent, and also what I believe is some political interference in some of my oversight work. Today, it deals specifically with the Department of Veterans Affairs—as we know it around here, the VA.

On April 2 of last year, 2021, I sent letters to the VA and the VA Office of Inspector General based on allegations from multiple whistleblowers. Those whistleblowers reported numerous ethical violations, retaliation, and possible leaking of market-sensitive information that may have affected retail investors. I have been waiting more than a year for a response to my inquiries.

Emails obtained through the Freedom of Information Act by a government watchdog group called Empower Oversight show that career public servants at the VA prepared a response to

my letter over a year ago, but when it came time for the Secretary of the VA, McDonough, to send that letter to my office, senior Biden political officials blocked it. It appears that Biden-appointed VA officials have issued an order not to respond to my request, and I have a pretty good reason why.

We know that the VA received these allegations from whistleblowers early on, and the VA ignored them. Whistleblowers alleged, among other things, conflicts of interest between a senior-level VA official and a company represented by her husband. This official, Charmain Bogue, has since left public service. The company that employed her husband, Barrett Bogue, is entitled “Veterans Education Success,” or VES.

On multiple occasions, starting in December of 2017, an employee at VA sought guidance from VA lawyers on whether Ms. Bogue should recuse herself on procurement-related matters. The lawyers affirmed that Ms. Bogue should recuse herself, and the employee even copied Ms. Bogue on that guidance of recusal. The employee also alerted VA leadership of Ms. Bogue's need to recuse herself. Ms. Bogue never recused herself, but the VA employee was reportedly removed from Federal service. Now, that is retaliation. That is unjustified. It should never happen.

In response to my letter about these and other allegations, the VA Office of Inspector General immediately opened an investigation. The VA Office of Inspector General uncovered more wrongdoing than originally thought, and I have four points that they uncovered. I am only going to go into those four.

Ms. Bogue participated in matters involving her husband's employer, contrary to ethics guidance. Ms. Bogue's interaction with that company violated the apparent conflict rules. Ms. Bogue did not provide sufficient detail to VA ethics about her spouse's business. No. 4, Ms. Bogue refused to cooperate fully in the OIG's investigation.

These are only some of the allegations that I have received.

The VA Office of Inspector General did not review the allegations of whistleblower reprisal; nor did it investigate whether VA employees mishandled nonpublic information.

I raised questions about all of these issues, and to date, I have had no substantive communication from Secretary McDonough about any of these questions I have raised. So what is the VA hiding? What else did the VA know or choose to ignore?

Congress needs answers not stonewalling. Independent government watchdogs and whistleblower advocates have called on the VA to review government grants and screen for companies and individuals who have engaged in wrongdoing. They have also urged the VA to consider whether those individuals or entities should be able to obtain government contracts in the future.

I would be very interested to know whether those who refuse to cooperate with an OIG request can still obtain taxpayer money through government contracts. The Biden administration has claimed, time and again, that it is the most transparent administration in U.S. history. Well, I think I just gave you an example that that is not true, and it certainly hasn't been true, in this case, for emphasis.

The VA deserves much better. Of course, the VA serves our veterans, and our veterans deserve much better from that Agency. The VA needs to start being as transparent as they claim to be transparent and cooperate with this investigation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The senior Senator from Wyoming.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about the economic crisis that the American people are living through, caused by Joe Biden.

The American people have just had the most expensive Fourth of July of all times. It is interesting what a difference a year and a half makes. Last July, 6 months into the Biden administration, the White House was insisting inflation was either nonexistent or transitory. The White House even bragged that the cost of a July 4 cookout last year had dropped 16 cents—not 16 percent but 16 cents—from the year before. Here we are, 1 year later, with 1 year of Democratic control, and the cost of that same cookout is up not just 16 cents but 16 percent. Hamburgers, hot dogs, potato salad—across the board—everything is up. This July 4, the only way to save money was to stay home.

According to one survey, one out of every three Americans changed their summer travel plans for this summer because of high gas prices. People are driving less; they can't afford gas. They are shopping less; they can't afford the food, and they are getting a lot less from their paychecks.

The New York Times says people—I was astonished by this—are even using up vacation days so they don't have to drive in to work because they cannot afford the gas. They are using vacation days so they don't have to drive because they can't afford the gas. The average American family is now paying \$100 more each and every week just to buy the same things that they bought a year ago. So just to stay even is \$100 more a week this year than last. Week after week after week, in the Joe Biden economy, people can afford less and less and less. One study from the University of Michigan showed the Biden era had already seen the steepest drop in disposable income since Herbert Hoover.

Who could believe it?

The savings rate right now is the lowest since the great recession of 2009. Household debt is the highest ever. People are trying to borrow or spend

their savings just to keep up and to maintain the sorts of things they could afford easily last year. Consumer confidence in this country, right now, is at an alltime low. The concern, of course, is that the worst may yet be coming. More and more experts say we are headed toward a recession. A recession is when the economy shrinks for 6 months in a row.

Two weeks ago, the Commerce Department updated their estimate of economic growth for the first 3 months of the year, and the update said the economy had grown even less and had shrunk more than they had thought. The economy shrank more than the Biden Commerce Department admitted to in their first assessment, but there are already signs all around the country that the economy is shrinking. No wonder, in a national poll last week, only 1 in 10 Americans thinks the economy is heading in the right direction. Inflation plus a recession is called stagflation. I don't think we have had that since the days of Jimmy Carter, likely when the Presiding Officer was either a little boy or hadn't yet been born.

Democrats have run Washington for 17 full months now, and they are doing absolutely nothing here at home to bring down the pain at the pump or the pain at the grocery store.

Joe Biden says gas prices will remain high for “as long as it takes.” He says we just have to suffer through it, and he blames everything today on the war in Ukraine. He won't admit to the fact that the inflation crisis started 10 months before the war in Ukraine. Gas prices had already gone up by \$1.15 a gallon before Putin's invasion.

The American people get it. They remember all of this. It doesn't matter what Joe Biden happens to say. Of course, he is off to Saudi Arabia tomorrow, looking for more oil, when we have plenty of it in the United States. The American people clearly know who to blame for the inflation that is causing them pain every single day.

It is interesting to see that even Jimmy Carter's economists blame Joe Biden and the Democrats in Congress for the inflation that is hitting the country today.

Last week, the New York Times published an interview with Jimmy Carter's top economic advisers. They were asked what lessons they had learned from the miserable failures of the Carter administration. Jimmy Carter's Secretary of the Treasury, Michael Blumenthal, put the blame for today's inflation on the spending by Joe Biden and the Democrats. This is Jimmy Carter's Treasury Secretary pointing his finger at Joe Biden and the Democrats. Jimmy Carter's Treasury Secretary said that Democrats need to give up the gimmicks, turn off the money printer, and stop the reckless spending.

This is at a time when, behind closed doors, Senator SCHUMER and others are trying to come up with another gim-

mick to add more spending and higher taxes.

This article in the New York Times says:

Mr. Blumenthal urged Mr. Biden . . . to abandon his [Build Back Better bill]—

I call it “Build Back Biden.” He said he should abandon that—in favor of deficit reduction.

He said:

[F]ighting inflation comes first. . . . [B]y trying to take half measures . . . you merely prolong the pain.

The American people are tired of the pain that has been imposed upon them by Joe Biden and the Democrats in this body and across the floor.

Well, he is right. Jimmy Carter's Treasury Secretary is right. Fighting inflation needs to come first. Yet, for Joe Biden, fighting inflation has come last or not at all—denial that it even existed, dismissing it as “don't worry,” and continuing today to try to avoid the reality that he is facing.

You know, the Democrats in this body could learn something from the Carter administration. After all, Joe Biden has an even lower approval rating. It is hard to believe. I would have never believed, on the day Joe Biden was inaugurated, that by the Fourth of July weekend of 2022 that Joe Biden would have earned—fully earned—an approval rating lower than Jimmy Carter had. Remember, Jimmy Carter lost his reelection bid to Ronald Reagan.

So far, Democrats seem to have learned nothing. Last March, Republicans warned the Democrats that their spending and borrowing would cause inflation. Democrats ignored the warning.

Senator SCHUMER even said:

I do not think the dangers of inflation . . . in the near term are very real.

That may have been a New Yorker's view of it, but people around the country had a clear understanding that inflation was coming, and it did. It turned out Senator SCHUMER was wrong, and the dangers were very, very real for working families.

So the rich liberals in New York and the rich liberals in California who run the Democratic Party will be just fine. It is the working families who are trying to pay their bills every day—they are the ones who are paying the price for these reckless policies of the Democratic Party.

Democrats remain completely out of touch with American workers. It is obvious. Last March, all 50 Senate Democrats put an additional \$2 trillion on the national debt. The Biden inflation crisis started, and the fire of inflation started 1 month later.

Last week's New York Times article also quotes a Carter Treasury official who warned against socialist price controls with regard to energy. So what did the House Democrats just do? They just voted for socialist price controls. Now Senate Democrats seem to be eager to do the same thing.

Democrats are ignoring the warning signs once again. It seems they refuse