

One day, I hope the barrier-breakers of today will be closer to the norm of tomorrow. We want more women to sit on our courts, especially the Supreme Court. We need more people of color, more public defenders, more civil rights lawyers, more children of immigrants to sit on our courts to reflect the broad diversity that America is and will continue to be. In fact, it will continue to grow.

The more Americans look at our courts and see people who look like them and come from the same backgrounds and share similar experiences, the better off our justice system and our democracy shall be. And nowhere else is this more important than the Supreme Court.

So I applaud the President's commitment to choosing a qualified and historic nominee, and the Senate stands ready to work quickly to confirm President Biden's pick when we get it.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Mr. President, on economics and economic wins, at the beginning of last year, the CBO projected that the U.S. economy would reach a growth rate of about 3.5 percent by the end of 2021. The International Monetary Fund had a rosier outlook. They said economic growth could be closer to 4 percent. The Federal Open Market Committee was perhaps the most optimistic, forecasting a growth rate of about 4.3 percent.

They were all wrong. The U.S. economy shattered most expectations and grew at the amazing rate of 5.7 percent, the strongest rate since the time of Ronald Reagan. This was no accident, far from it. Last year's historic turnaround is a reminder that the right leadership in government matters. Democrats promised in 2020 to fix Donald Trump's utter mismanagement of the COVID crisis and get our country back on track. And, a year later, after securing the strongest growth rate in decades, Democrats are delivering on that promise.

After Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, I said: "Help is on the way." And that help is getting America back on a path to normal. Though we are still learning to live with the virus, our economy, our communities, and our schools are better off because of vaccines, because of testing, and because of targeted legislation we passed last year, like the RESTAURANTS Act and Save Our Stages.

I want to stress an important point that is forgotten too often. We are finally seeing wages go up at a significant rate. That is dollars in the working people's pockets.

For decades, economists have decried the lack of wage growth in America. It has been reported that from 2000 to 2020, if you were in the bottom 75 percent of Americans—the majority—your wage growth was not real at all. In other words, costs ate up all of the wage growth, and the wage growth was paltry, in many years: 0 percent, 1 percent, declining in some. Lack of wage

growth has been the scourge of our economy for so long, as it affects average working folks, closing off opportunities for millions of hard-working people who have worked harder and harder only to see their lives deteriorate.

Now we are finally seeing signs that wages are going up, and that is going to stay for years to come. This is real progress for working families. As we keep fighting to lower costs, we Democrats are going to do everything we can to see that this large wage growth remains and continues, and that will mean better lives for the American people.

We know the work is not done. We know we must keep working to help Americans lower costs so they can better afford the basics, from healthcare and prescription drugs to daily essentials like groceries, to the costs of higher education. Addressing these issues remains our focus.

We also must address strained and broken supply chains. Later this week, the House will take up the long-awaited USICA bill by passing a companion, the America COMPETES Act. I have been working very hard to make sure that this happens. Once conferenced, this legislation would bring manufacturing back to America instead of sending jobs overseas. This bill will say: "Buy America"; keep the jobs here.

We saw what just happened in Ohio in the advent: thousands and thousands of new jobs in manufacturing. So this legislation is going to bring manufacturing back to America, bring jobs over here, good-paying jobs back here.

It would strengthen domestic supply chains and, thus, reduce our costs and, in particular, help our country address its semiconductor shortage, a driver of rising costs in so many different things, from cars to cell phones to everything.

Finally, all this is a reminder of what Democrats at our core stand for: building ladders of opportunity for working Americans to get to the middle class and provide stability to those already in the middle class so they can stay there and thrive. And wages going up is a large part of that. And this administration's record on wage increases, we haven't seen in decades.

We still have more work to do to bring our country out of the rubble of COVID so that we can look confidently into the future. But the growth of last year showed we are well on our way, and Democrats will keep working to help working people—working families, middle-class families, poorer families trying to get to the middle class—have the kind of prosperity and help they need and deserve.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. President, Senate business: approps and on nominations. On a separate matter, we Senate Democrats will continue to work with our Republican and House counterparts on the vital task of passing an omnibus package to fund the Federal Government, avoid a

shutdown, and ensure government effectively serves the American people.

This morning, I will meet with Democratic appropriators to discuss the state of negotiations as we work toward the omnibus. I will be meeting with Speaker PELOSI in that meeting, as well. Later today, the four-corners appropriators—Chairman LEAHY, Ranking Member SHELBY, Chairwoman DELAUNO, and Ranking Member GRANGER—will also meet to continue their talks. We need to have an omnibus to fund the government. That is the goal we are working toward, and I want to thank my colleagues for their diligence and their leadership.

Separately, of course, today the Senate will continue confirming the President's highly qualified nominees. Because of a growing backlog of non-controversial nominees, which a small handful of Republicans continue to obstruct, I filed cloture 2 weeks ago to move forward on 20 individuals. Today, we will have votes on three of these nominees. We are prepared to work late into the evenings this week to get these nominees confirmed without further delay.

Confirming these nominees is a top priority for the Senate this week. They will serve on our Federal judiciary, advance America's diplomatic and economic interests, and work to strengthen our national security. The vast majority of these men and women were reported out of committee with strong bipartisan support and normally would pass through this Chamber with consent, without a lengthy process. Instead, because of a handle of obstructionist Republicans, the Senate will take the necessary votes to confirm these nominees.

Every President deserves to staff their team with the individuals that the President sees fit, and we in the Senate will keep working to make sure President Biden has his nominees confirmed so they can carry out their mission serving the American people.

I yield the floor.

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. MCCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Working Americans and their families are being hammered by the worst inflation in 40 years, and Washington Democrats own it. Sometimes it can be difficult to directly connect Washington policies to the downstream effects on our families. Sometimes it can be tricky to identify cause and effect. But not this time—not in this case.

The pain that families are feeling today was not just foreseeable, it was

actually foreseen by experts all across the political spectrum.

Economists said this inflation is exactly—exactly—what would happen if Democrats pushed ahead with their reckless spending sprees that the economy simply did not need.

Larry Summers, who was Treasury Secretary for President Clinton and ran the National Economic Council for President Obama, warned Democrats a year ago this week that Democrats far-left plans could trigger “inflationary pressures of a kind we have not seen in a generation.”

Jason Furman, who chaired President Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers, said the very same thing. He said the Democrat’s spending binge was “definitely too big for the moment. I don’t know any economist that was recommending something the size of what was done.” That is Jason Furman, President Obama’s Council of Economic Advisers.

But our Democratic colleagues did not let families’ actual needs restrain their radical daydreaming. They had already made up their minds. This temporary pandemic was to serve as a Trojan horse for permanent socialism.

Remember, right from the start, in March of 2020, with Americans dying from this new, mysterious virus, a top House Democrat called it “a tremendous opportunity to restructure things to fit our vision.”

So the new Democratic Party government’s first major act was to start printing, borrowing, and spending money like there was no tomorrow. They managed to blow through roughly \$2 trillion on a so-called COVID bill that utterly failed to crush the virus. Less than 9 percent of the money went to the healthcare fight at all. Even the liberal expert, Steve Rattner, a former Obama official, said the spending spree was Democrats’ “original sin” when it comes to inflation.

And working Americans are paying dearly for it every single day. Just look at the headlines:

2021 went down as the worst year for inflation since 1982.

Higher prices seeped into just about every thing households and businesses buy.

There’s no telling when prices will fall to more sustainable levels.

Further quotes:

[R]ising costs for food . . . rent and other necessities are heightening the financial pressures on America’s households.

Rising prices have wiped out the healthy pay increases that many Americans have been receiving, making it harder for households, especially lower-income families, to afford basic expenses.

Yes, it is true that inflation is up all around the world. This is partially a global phenomenon. But the United States has it worse—worse—than almost everyone else.

Data from Pew show that America’s inflationary spike has been the third worst among all countries they measure. We have it worse than any other country in the G12—much worse inflation than the UK or France or Aus-

tralia or Japan. That is what this agenda has bought us.

And Americans are afraid this may still just be the beginning. Seventy-nine percent of Americans now expect inflation will get even worse over the next 6 months. Now the Democratic-caused inflation has the Federal Reserve signaling they may need to raise interest rates higher and faster than they had expected.

This brings its own set of risks upon the American people, and, again, it is exactly—exactly—what experts predicted.

A full year ago this week, the economist, Michael Strain, testified that Democrats’ spending could corner the Fed and force them to clamp down on the recovery sooner than necessary. Democrats had mainstream economic experts warning against their reckless spending plans and still decided to drive right over the cliff.

Working families are paying the price every day—at the checkout counter, at the gas pump, at the used car lot, when they pay their bills, when they look for housing. And now Washington Democrats are trying again to revive talk of yet another—another—reckless bout of spending this year.

American families are already hurting enough. They need that bad idea to stay buried.

BURMA

Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, today marks 1 year since the people of Burma yet again had their future hijacked by a military coup. Since this time last year, the Tatmadaw—which is what they call the Burmese military—has tried to achieve, through open repression and violence, what it long sought to achieve from the shadows. They want to derail Burma’s democracy.

The ruling generals now have the blood of thousands of protesters and innocent civilians on their hands. Thousands more are languishing in prison on political charges.

Those detained include my friend Aung San Suu Kyi. They have also included a number of foreigners like the American journalists Nathan Maung and Danny Fenster. The Australian economist Sean Turnell remains unjustly imprisoned for now. Even one political prisoner would be one too many.

The Tatmadaw’s violence in the streets and its desecration of justice in sham courts have been a sad step backward for Burma. Unfortunately, it is a step that many of us who pay close attention to this country have feared.

But 1 year ago—1 year on—it is encouraging to see the people of Burma rejecting one of the oppressors’ favorite cynical tactics, and that cynical tactic is to try to stoke resentment and violence between diverse ethnic groups.

Well, Burma’s ethnic groups are no longer buying that. They see the common enemy that denies them their freedom. Millions of people across

Burma are rallying together behind the representative National Unity Government.

They are swelling the ranks of the National Unity Consultative Council in what can rightly be described as a revolution. But their bravery and unity may yield little without greater international assistance.

A year ago, I called on the Biden administration to impose costs on those who stand in the way of the people of Burma and urged our partners to do the same. Along with many in the Burmese diaspora communities that call Kentucky home, I was encouraged by President Biden’s quick condemnation of the coup, the sanctions against two of the junta’s main funding sources, and efforts to target individual coup leaders.

But, regrettably, these well-intentioned efforts have not been enough. There is more the Biden administration must do, and there is more that must be done by our democratic partners out in the region. The administration should be prioritizing Burma in its diplomacy throughout Asia, especially India.

Along with our partners, the United States should expand sanctions to further isolate the military and security forces. We should move to expose countries like Russia and China that aid and abet the repression of the people of Burma.

We must push back on Cambodia, which chairs the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and indicates they may welcome—actually welcome—the illegitimate regime to international summits.

The United States and our partners should also provide more direct help to the representative institutions that are trying to protect the people of that country. This should include direct, cross-border, humanitarian assistance that bypasses the Tatmadaw, institutional support, and capacity building for the NUG and the NUCC.

Look, the international stakes go beyond Burma itself. The Tatmadaw aren’t the only ones who benefit from chaos and injustice reigning in Burma.

The Chinese Communist Party loathes—literally loathes—the idea of a functioning democracy in its own backyard. They have been working for years to keep Burma weak and subservient to Beijing. And Russia has found a happy customer in the Tatmadaw for surplus arms.

So, 1 year on, the people of Burma are paying close attention. From prison, from exile, from the streets of its cities, they are watching to see which friends of democracy have their backs. They are watching which champions of human rights remember the political prisoners whom the junta has jailed and the innocent men, women, and children it has murdered.

I have been proud to support the people of Burma on their long journey toward self-government. I have been proud to help ensure their struggles are not forgotten.