

was broken and couldn't do big things, this Democratic majority has shown that real change is possible. The results speak for themselves. Jobs across the country remain up. Americans are going back to work. Our supply chains are healing. In fact, freight rates on ocean trade channels have dropped by 60 percent since January. As gas prices continue their 2-month drop, we are seeing evidence that inflation might be starting to ease up.

Of course, the work isn't done. As we begin this short work period, we have several high-priority items that demand our immediate attention. Before this work period concludes, the Senate must come together to pass a continuing resolution to extend government funding beyond the September 30 deadline.

Last week, the administration sent us a request for a number of funding items they would like us to work on—aid to Ukraine, pandemic relief, and other items.

This process, of course, needs to be bipartisan. Democrats are going to work in good faith to avoid even a hint of a shutdown, and it is my expectation that our Republican colleagues will do the same.

We will also work this month to confirm even more of President Biden's judicial nominees. Later today, the Senate is scheduled to vote to advance the nomination of Judge John Lee to serve as a circuit court judge for the Seventh Circuit. If confirmed, Judge Lee would make history as the first Asian-American judge to sit on the Seventh Circuit, joining the proud company of other Biden nominees who are making our courts fairer and more representative of our great country.

A graduate of Harvard and Harvard Law School, Judge Lee was unanimously confirmed by this Chamber a decade ago to serve as a district judge. In his time on the bench, he has proven himself to be impartial, fairminded, and committed to the rule of law.

Judge Lee will be the first of many judicial nominees whom we will advance this month and beyond because now more than ever, the Senate must make judicial confirmations a top priority.

We have a lot of work to do in the Senate to keep improving the lives of the American people, so in the coming weeks, let us continue with the same vigor, the same determination, the same persistence that has made this one of the most productive Senate sessions the Senate has seen in a long, long time.

#### STUDENT LOAN DEBT RELIEF PLAN

Finally, I want to say a few words on another monumental development that happened over the August recess: student debt cancellation.

For the past 2 years, I have repeatedly stated that with the simple flick of a pen, President Biden could lower costs for millions of Americans by canceling their student debt. Everywhere I go, student debt is always front of

mind for many of my fellow New Yorkers, as it is for millions across the country.

There are many who don't have student debt—many—but for those who do, it is deep. This is not just 1 of 10 issues; this is the issue that really, really bothers them and motivates them, to have to wake up in the middle of the night, saying: How am I going to make that \$400 payment next month when my salary doesn't stretch that far? What am I going to cut out of my life?

Well, with that long-awaited flick of the pen, President Biden gave tens of millions of Americans a new lease on life by canceling significant amounts of student debt.

To President Biden, I say thank you. Thank you for listening to our cause. Thank you for taking action.

The President's decision will make it easier for millions of Americans to finally pursue their own American dream, whether that means making that downpayment on a house or buying that new car or opening a business or saving for retirement. It will help close the racial wealth gap that still holds far too many Americans back, and most of all, it is going to make our economy strong.

Now, over the past few weeks, we have heard a lot of fake outrage from Republicans, saying that canceling student debt is nothing more than a giveaway to wealthy Americans. The same Republicans who made tax cuts for the ultrarich their No. 1 priority are suddenly apoplectic at the thought of helping working—and middle-class Americans with student debt relief.

Well, here is the truth, I say to my Republican colleagues: Among borrowers who are no longer in school, 90 percent of the debt canceled will go to those earning less than \$75,000 a year—the opposite of the tax cuts that Republicans pushed for where the vast majority of the money went to the top 1 percent and the top 10 percent.

Let me repeat that. Among borrowers who are no longer in school, nearly 90 percent of the debt being canceled will go to those earning less than \$75,000 a year.

Let's not forget that a majority of student loans are held by people whose families have zero net worth—zero. A majority of student loans are to families who have zero net worth. That is why the greatest help will go to those with the greatest need. Pell grant recipients, who for the most part come from families making under \$60,000 a year, will have up to \$20,000 of their debt canceled.

So rather than helping the privileged few, canceling student debt is going to lift up Americans from all walks of life—students of color, poor Americans, children of immigrants, working- and middle-class families struggling to either get to the middle class or stay there.

So, again, I thank President Biden for taking action. I also want to thank

champions like Senator WARREN, who has been such a great partner in this activity, Senator WARNOCK, and Representative PRESSLEY, who joined with me in calling for the President to take this step. They have all been great partners in the effort, and I am glad our efforts finally began to pay off.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

#### EASTERN KENTUCKY FLOODING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it has been over a month since relentless rains and major flooding devastated Eastern Kentucky. This disaster took homes, businesses, and at least 39 lives. Only a few months after tornadoes had caused widespread damage in the western part of our State, catastrophe struck our Commonwealth one more time.

I traveled back to Eastern Kentucky multiple times during the August State work period to survey damage, meet with survivors, and lend any help I could. What I saw were scenes of absolute destruction: water-logged houses, swollen creeks, washed-out roads. I heard directly from survivors who have shouldered impossible burdens over the past month, struggling to salvage belongings and to literally try to rebuild their lives. Agencies report that thousands of homes were destroyed and damaged in the flooding. Many of those affected lack flood insurance.

I will say that as devastating as the flooding was, stories of heroism and generosity still shine through. The local officials I met with reserved special praise for Kentucky's National Guard. Our guardsmen mobilized at the outset of this crisis to perform daring rescues and to distribute critical supplies to stranded residents. Regular citizens also came to the aid of their neighbors and friends in any way they could, sometimes in trucks and sometimes on horseback or jet skis.

Help has poured in from around our State and beyond, both from private charities and trained emergency responders, but, of course, there is still a tremendous need for help. Eastern Kentucky has notoriously rugged terrain. It also had preexisting communications issues before the floods. These factors have made rescue and rebuilding uniquely challenging already, and this is only the beginning.

Although FEMA is playing a critical role in Eastern Kentucky's recovery, Kentuckians have grave concerns about shortcomings in the Federal response. The Agency's convoluted application processes have left far too many

flood victims without the timely aid they need, often due to just simple clerical errors. I heard about these issues firsthand from countless Kentuckians I met during my multiple visits.

Of course, I quickly called FEMA Administrator Criswell to say her Agency needs to step it up. I visited the Kentucky Emergency Operations Center to review the joint State and Federal response firsthand. I convened leaders from our hardest hit counties, the State legislature, and Federal response Agencies so we have clearer lines of communication moving forward.

I hope and expect aid will begin to flow more smoothly to Eastern Kentucky soon, and I will continue working around the clock here in Washington to try to help make that happen.

And I promise to keep standing strong by Eastern Kentucky's side as our immediate efforts evolve into longer term rebuilding.

A long road—a very long road—to recovery lies before us, but Eastern Kentucky will come back stronger than ever.

#### THE ECONOMY

Now on another matter, American families are hurting, and they are very clearly telling anybody who will listen to them what our priorities ought to be.

Americans' No. 1 concern—by a mile—is the crushing inflation that Democrats spent us into. The share of Americans who name inflation as our most urgent problem is almost triple the next closest issue.

Democrats' policies have working people paying a Democrat inflation tax of more than 13 percent on top of their grocery bills, 15 percent extra on their electric bills, and on and on down the list of everything that families need to just stay afloat.

As a result, Democrats have presided over plummeting real wages for American workers. The average American worker has gotten a raise on paper, but their bigger paycheck buys them less than their smaller paycheck bought them this time last year.

Now, this wasn't inevitable. Inflation did not have to be nearly this bad.

Democrats chose to spend so recklessly. Democrats chose to wage this economic warfare against the middle class, against their savings, against their financial stability, against the purchasing power and the lifestyles that workers and parents sacrificed, literally, for years to build up.

Americans are also deeply concerned about the erosion of law and order on our streets, in our cities, on our borders, and across our country.

When you combine together crime and immigration, the issue of law and order ranks as the people's clear No. 2 concern, second only to inflation.

Last year, the national murder rate reached its highest level in 25 years. Cities across the country are contending with a historic surge in

carjackings. My hometown of Louisville is now averaging an auto theft every 2½ hours. President Biden's failed border policies have Customs and Border Protection encountering 200 percent more fentanyl and apprehending the most illegal immigrants they have seen in more than 20 years.

So there is no mystery about the crises facing our country. The American people know what needs to be addressed. Republicans know what needs to be addressed. But, unfortunately, the Democrats, who control the Senate, the House, and the White House, are still refusing to get with the program.

Democrats' top priority for the entire year was the multi-hundred-billion-dollar reckless taxing and spending spree they rammed through in August.

Americans may want their leaders to cut inflation, fight crime and drugs, and secure the border, but Democrats just spent hundreds of billions of dollars of the people's money doing precisely none of that.

Instead, our big-spending colleagues treated themselves to 87,000 new IRS agents, job-killing tax hikes, and the same kind of liberal energy policies that now have California officials warning—warning—about rolling blackouts and begging people not to charge up their electric cars.

Oh, oh, and our Democratic colleagues have given no indication that cutting inflation, fighting crime, or securing the border will be on the Senate's agenda for September either.

When our people are hurting this badly and speaking this clearly, it takes a willful choice—a choice—for Democrats to ignore them.

Stable prices, safe streets, reliable energy, and a secure border—four of the most basic duties that any government owes its people; four things Democrats have proven they cannot deliver.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

#### THE ECONOMY

Mr. DURBIN. Good news to report to my colleague from the Commonwealth of Kentucky: a gallon of gasoline on the way to the airport this morning—\$3.46 a gallon. I wish it were lower, but we have made progress from the days when it was over \$5. We are moving in the right direction.

And, incidentally, this President has created more jobs than any President in a similar period in the history of the United States.

Do we have challenges? You bet we do. But to write this administration off as unproductive is to ignore the obvious.

We came out of this pandemic, and when we did, we faced the problems that nations around the world were facing. Literally, could we deal with inflation? Demand was pent up, and it overwhelmed the services and goods that were available and inflation started to rise.

It took its toll—it still does—on American families, but to ignore what we have been able to do is to really turn our backs on reality.

What about that rescue plan, the American Rescue Plan? I remember it, and I remember there wasn't a single Republican voting for it.

Almost 20 percent of the American Rescue Plan went to State and local governments to deal with issues like crime to make safer streets and safer neighborhoods for Americans across the board. That is the kind of money well-spent, and yet the Republicans wouldn't give us a single vote.

You heard the Senator from Kentucky deriding it at this moment as a waste of billions of dollars. It is money well-spent, and I found out personally, firsthand, when I went back in my State over the August recess.

I didn't just confine myself to the blue areas of the State, and there are big ones and a big part of our State, and I am happy to visit there. I went to some of the redder sections of our State, the areas that voted for Donald Trump in the last election over Joe Biden. I don't do particularly well there either, but I wanted to visit with them, and I felt that there were things I needed to learn about what families and communities were facing.

I went to Herrin, IL, in the southern part of our State, where my family has its roots, and I went to Southern Illinois Healthcare, which is a major healthcare consortium serving most of downstate Illinois—rural, smalltown America, struggling with providing professional medical care but doing a fine job.

We have something called congressionally directed spending now. It used to be known as earmarks. I am unapologetic about it. I believe that if you make a public disclosure of these earmarks to justify them, taxpayers understand this is Federal money being brought home from Washington to their States and communities, where it is needed.

So I went to Herrin, IL, where we were able to announce an earmark of \$1 million, which is going to provide for about half the cost of a new physical rehab facility—critically important.

I met some interesting people there. I met a little fellow, 4 years old, the victim of cerebral palsy. His name is Maverick. Maverick had a big smile on his face. He was there at the rehab center to introduce me to the nurse that has been working with him, strong, courageous little fellow—the pride of his family, the kind of courage he is showing.

Now, he has a rehab facility that is world-class in his region, in his neighborhood—the alternative, drive to St. Louis. You hear that over and over again in that part of the State: We just don't have any. We have to drive to St. Louis.

When it comes to rehab services for Maverick, kids like him, and adults as well, they now have a fighting chance to get something local.