

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.

And let me add, another fellow was there by the name of Riley Baird. Riley is a high school student, and he is an amazing kid himself. He is a Boy Scout, and I used to be a Boy Scout a long, long time ago. He had that sash with all the merit badges on it. I think I had five of them when I finally quit. He must have had 50, maybe 100. He had them all on his way and past as an Eagle Scout.

He decided to make that rehab clinic his project. He and his family built some toys that the kids are using there, and he was there to accept the recognition and praise he deserved.

He has a brother named Corbin—twin brother named Corbin, also an Eagle Scout, who picked a different charity to provide help to.

I just want to say for anybody who is despondent about the future of this country, you ought to meet Corbin and Riley Baird. Those two young men are going to be leaders, I am sure, in their community and beyond.

And it reminded me, too, that we ought to take a look at the positive things that are coming about. This notion of the reconciliation bill not serving America is ignoring the obvious.

How many of us in the Senate—Republicans and Democrats—have had press conferences put on campaign ads talking about the cost of prescription drugs? Guess what. We finally did something about it. After all these years and all these headlines and all these brochures and all these ads, we finally did something.

The reconciliation bill, which passed the U.S. Senate without a single Republican vote—without one—will finally address the cost of prescription drugs for people on Medicare. And it starts reaching beyond that to say the pharmaceutical industry has to be responsible. They have never been able to defend or explain why the same drugs—exactly the same drugs—made in America are charged in Canada for a fraction of what people have to pay in this country; why Americans have to go without, while in other countries there are discounts that allow families to afford the drugs they need to be healthy and to live.

Well, we have done something about it. We passed a bill that will make a difference.

And when we talk about issues like electricity—I am going to brag a little bit here—my wife and I decided 2 or 3 weeks ago to start producing electricity. We bought solar panels for our roof in Springfield, IL. We are not the first family to have them, but we are one of the few. I predict that is going to change in a hurry. Why? Because in that reconciliation bill, we started taking an honest look at what it takes to reduce climate change and to give our kids a planet they can live on. It means that each of us has to change our lifestyle some.

Well, I left this morning a little bit of sunshine in Springfield, IL, and it means that I am producing electricity

with the local utility. I am going to try to do even more. My wife and I are devoted to showing—at least setting an example in this region, in this area.

The bill we passed in reconciliation is going to create incentives for people to put solar panels on their homes, to buy heat pumps, electric water heaters—things that will reduce the use of fossil fuels and, instead, move us toward a more electric economy.

And, yes, automobiles are headed in that direction too, and it didn't take a Federal mandate. The major car producers are headed that way, whether we like it or not. They understand where we need to go as a country and where the consumers are headed, and I think that is a good indication as well.

So when I hear the Republican leader come to the floor and say that things are so awful, I don't doubt that many families are struggling, and we should be sensitive and mindful of that every single day, but a lot of good things are happening too. The employment figures are encouraging. Our move toward dealing with climate change is encouraging, as well. The fact the pharmaceutical companies are going to be held responsible and the fact that corporations that have had a net profit of \$1 billion or more—listen to that closely—net profit of \$1 billion or more in the last 3 years are finally going to have to pay some Federal income taxes. Americans are used to paying their fair share of taxes. Why are these corporations making over \$1 billion in net profits each year not paying a penny? That is going to change, and it is in the bill too. And I know it is a bone in the throat of my Republican colleagues, but it is only fair.

This week we return after a 4-week recess. I was traveling around my State, listening to ideas and concerns. And you know what I heard over and over again? And this is overwhelming, particularly in the area of healthcare, but not exclusively: We just don't have enough people to fill the vacancies and jobs in America. We have roughly 11 million vacancies and 5 million people unemployed. That is the reality.

And when it comes to healthcare workers, it is a reality that means the cost of medical care is going up. If you can't find a local nurse to go on staff, on payroll, and be with you for a while and you have to rely on contract nurses, those who come and go, they have all the skill and training, but they are looking for a pretty big paycheck, sometimes three times what the regular nurses are receiving. That drives up the cost of healthcare. And hospitals and clinics are desperate for these nurses to be there.

I found all across my State—from the city of Chicago to the smallest town downstate—this is a challenge that we face and need to do something about.

But people, over and over again, despite what we saw in many of the reports on television, really do still love this country. They are concerned about the divisions we see every single day.

America has always been a can-do nation. Faith in the future and in our ability to solve our problems, create a better future, has always been part of American DNA.

It is hard to find common ground on scorched earth. As President Lincoln warned us long ago, "a house divided against itself cannot stand."

A few years later, as the Civil War ended and victory was in sight, President Lincoln pleaded, just outside this room, on his inauguration, with the people of the North and the South, and he said:

We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies.

He said that after the deadliest war that America ever experienced. He knew that the work of rebuilding this battered Nation and creating a better future would only be achieved if we were united—the United States of America.

This week marks the 21st anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attack on America. I will never forget that day as long as I live.

I know, Mr. President, that you won't forget it either because it affected your State and many people who live there.

Those who are old enough to remember not just the shocking grief of that day will also remember the intense sense of national unity that sustained us through the terrible days and weeks that followed. We lost so much, but we found a common purpose. We understood that we are one Nation, one people, with one destiny. We rise or we fall together.

As the Senate returns to the work of legislating, I hope that we will remember President Lincoln's plea that "we must not be enemies." Politics is not war. It is where we resolve our differences without war, in a democracy.

People in Illinois are concerned about our state of the economy. They are worried about inflation. I understand that. They are also feeling something that many haven't felt for a while, and that is hope. Why? Because of results. Inflation is, in fact, slowing. Gas prices are falling. At \$3.46 a gallon, I would have grabbed that a few weeks ago, and I hope it can go lower. Gas is down by more than \$1.20 a gallon on the average since the start of the summer.

Wages are up. People are back at work. We now have more than recovered all the jobs that our economy lost during the pandemic. Our economy has added more than 10 million new jobs, including 600,000 manufacturing jobs, under President Biden.

We are investing in infrastructure. I remind myself over and over again: Don't complain if construction on highways just slowed you down. You voted for it, Senator.

And I would vote for it again.

President Biden said yesterday, on Labor Day, in one of his speeches, that when we make this investment in infrastructure—a recordbreaking, historic amount—we will have the most

modern infrastructure in the world. Now, that is what a nation that is prepared to compete does.

We passed the CHIPS Act to preserve America's leadership in research and innovation and to produce semiconductors and jobs and the industries of the future in America, not in China. As the President also said yesterday, why wouldn't it be in America? We invented the chip. Shouldn't we be leading the world still?

Well, with the passage of the CHIPS legislation in a strong bipartisan vote on the floor, we are going to reclaim that lead.

We passed the Inflation Reduction Act, which includes the biggest ever investment in climate change and climate resilience. It will reduce inflationary pressure by cutting energy costs now and in the future, and it also reduces the cost of prescription drugs.

We are investing in the American people on the basis of a shared, sustainable economic prosperity.

Oh, one footnote that is well worth mentioning: The Federal deficit will shrink by \$1.7 trillion this year. All of the things that I have mentioned and all of the criticism we have heard from the other side of the aisle, and the deficit is going down.

Nearly all of these economic prosperity proposals were passed with Democratic votes only. Chips is an exception. Infrastructure is an exception. But the American Rescue Plan and the inflation reduction plan were strictly Democratic votes. It is our hope that our Republican colleagues will now join us and help us get back to work in fighting the common challenges facing the Nation.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on another matter, I want to take a moment to speak about one of my highest priorities as chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee: the confirmation of highly qualified judges. This is one of the great shared successes of President Biden and the Senate Democrats and Republicans who have stood with us on some key votes.

As of today, the Senate has confirmed 76 judges to lifetime positions during this 117th Congress. That figure includes Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, an outstanding jurist, the first Black woman to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.

I would just state that I have been in politics most of my adult life. I did not appreciate the impact that the selection of this African-American woman would have on the people I represent. Some of the toughest, hardest bargaining African-American women that I have known in politics have come up to me and, in a moment, broken down in tears to thank me for President Biden's leadership and the fact that the Senate approved this new Justice. It means that much to them. Her historic confirmation was a crowning achievement in our efforts to build a system of justice that works on behalf of every American.

Outside of the Supreme Court, as I mentioned, the Senate has confirmed an impressive number of Federal judges: 18 circuit court nominees, 57 district court nominees. Why is that important? Because the vast majority of cases don't make it to the Supreme Court. They are resolved by judges like these nominees, at the district and circuit court level.

Look at the most recent ruling yesterday, in terms of the judge in Florida and the special master that has been appointed for the records that were removed from Mar-a-Lago. That judge made a critical and historic decision. The judges we are approving are in the same position to do that, and with each one of the judges we have confirmed, the American people can trust that they will apply the law to the facts, follow the precedent, and defend the rule of law.

Now, these 76 judicial appointments are more than a statistic. With each confirmation, the Senate has taken a crucial step toward ensuring diversity in the Federal judiciary. President Biden and Senate Democrats have made it a priority to elevate judicial nominees from demographically and professionally diverse backgrounds. Many times, Republican Senators have joined us in this effort, and I want to give them credit where it is due.

During the 117th Congress we have shattered records when it comes to diversity on the Federal Bench. Of the 18 circuit judges confirmed by Senate Democrats, 14 are women and 13 are people of color. And of the 57 district court judges we have confirmed, 42 of the 57 are women and many represent a historic first—the first Muslim American article III judge to the first Latina article III judge in the State of Illinois.

We have confirmed a record number of nominees who have experience serving not only as prosecutors but also as public defenders, voting rights experts, civil rights attorneys. For too long, the perspectives that they represent have not been seen on our benches in Federal courts. Thanks to President Biden's leadership and the work of the Senate Democrats, the Federal Judiciary now includes many dedicated public servants who will help bring balance to the Nation's courts. And let me add that some of the key votes came from a handful of Republican Senators who have looked at these nominees in an honest fashion.

Every one of these jurists is highly qualified to serve our Nation and the American people. That is a welcome shift from the previous administration, which often advanced nominees who simply checked the box "Federalist Society." Thankfully, the judges taking the bench under President Biden are impartial and evenhanded. All of them will continue to administer equal justice under the law.

NOMINATION OF JOHN Z. LEE

Mr. President, later today, we will add, I hope, one more name to this impressive roster. The Senate will vote on

the nomination of Judge John Lee, who was selected for the Illinois seat on the Seventh Circuit.

If confirmed, Judge Lee will be the first Asian-American judge ever to serve on the Seventh Circuit. His confirmation will mark yet another stride forward in building a judiciary that reflects the diversity of our Nation.

Judge Lee was born to Korean parents in Germany. His father was a coal miner. His mother was a nurse. He arrived in America at the age of 4 and settled with his family in a one-bedroom apartment in the Albany Park neighborhood of Chicago.

It wasn't easy starting off in kindergarten in a new land, but Judge Lee says he found the support of a nurturing community of classmates and teachers. He quickly learned English and excelled in school, graduating magna cum laude from Harvard College and cum laude from Harvard Law School.

He began his legal career as a trial attorney in the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the Justice Department before working in private practice in Chicago. His practice focused on complex litigation, including antitrust and intellectual property.

In 2011, President Biden nominated Judge Lee to the District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. When he was confirmed in 2012 by voice vote, Judge Lee became the first Korean American to serve as an article III judge in Illinois.

Since joining the bench, he has written hundreds of opinions and presided over 35 trials that went to verdict or judgment. He also sat by designation on the Seventh Circuit, a number of times, writing several opinions for the majority.

During his time on the bench, he always applied the law to the facts before him in an evenhanded and fair fashion. Given his impeccable record and impressive credentials, it is no surprise that the American Bar Association has rated John Lee unanimously "well qualified" for this circuit court position.

He has the strong support of myself and Senator DUCKWORTH. I urge my colleagues to join us.

I want to close by emphasizing this: Our work is not finished by a long shot. Judge Lee is one of ten circuit court nominees awaiting action by the full Senate, and many more are still moving through the Committee. Each one of these public servants will bring much needed professional and demographic diversity.

The judges being confirmed by this Senate will ensure that the rule of law applies to every single one of us without fear or favor. They will work to uphold America's most sacred promise—equal justice for all.

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.