

They say marriage equality is not something Americans spend a lot of time thinking about anymore. They want us to believe that the Supreme Court would never do something as reckless as reversing the precedent of marriage equality that millions have relied on for years.

Well, where oh where have we heard that before? The very same people who suggested that *Roe* was established precedent now want us to think that the Supreme Court won't go further, even though a sitting Justice on the highest Court in the land openly said something to the contrary, and he is often joined by four others.

Lest we forget, marriage equality was not the law of the land a decade ago. Discrimination against LGBTQ Americans still continues to this day. Now MAGA Republicans have escalated their rhetoric against same sex marriage and want to normalize gender discrimination.

MAGA Republicans seem to make it their business to pick on certain groups, not to do things that are positive and move things forward but to sort of just point their fingers at someone and blame them for some abstract reason that really doesn't hurt them at all.

That is where this Republican Party—unfortunately, too many of them—are headed, led by these MAGA Republicans and often fomented by former President Trump.

Earlier this year—here is what I am talking about. This isn't pie in the sky. The Texas Republican GOP, earlier this year, even adopted a party platform. This is of the largest Republican State in the country, the one with the most congressional representatives. The Texas GOP adopted this year a party platform that said “homosexuality is an abnormal lifestyle choice.”

Let me repeat that. The largest Republican State in the country, its Republican Party, captured by MAGA fervor—absurd fervor—said “homosexuality is an abnormal lifestyle choice.”

Just yesterday, a judge said that employers can deny access to medication if they believe it would encourage homosexuality. And we all know that these MAGA Republicans and their ilk, led by this man named Leonard Leo, with billions of dollars of dark money, use the courts to move America backward—move the courts to move America backward. And that is what happened yesterday with this judge coming up with this absurd, obnoxious, despicable resolution.

I trust that that radical view of that judge and of that Texas GOP is not something many of us embrace here in this Chamber. But we can't act as if our fundamental rights will stay safe if we aren't willing to safeguard them through legislation. If we are going to let these MAGA judges—rightwing, appointed by Leonard Leo and the Federalist Society—if we are not going to let them move America backward, then we have an obligation to act.

So let me make clear that a vote on marriage equality will happen on the Senate floor in the coming weeks, and I hope there will be at least 10 Republicans to support it.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on the related subject, obviously, of judges, today the Senate will continue fulfilling its constitutional duty to confirm more judges to sit on our Federal judiciary.

It has really been a productive week here on the floor when it comes to judges. Yesterday, we confirmed John Lee to serve a lifetime appointment as circuit judge on the Seventh Circuit, the first Asian American to ever sit on that court.

Today, we will confirm another circuit judge—Andre Mathis—to sit on the Sixth Circuit. When confirmed, Mathis will be the 78th judge we have confirmed under President Biden—more than President Trump, more than President Obama, more than President Bush had confirmed up to this point. It is a great record. We are proud of it, and we aren't done.

Later this afternoon, we will begin working on our third—our third—circuit court judge of the week, Salvador Mendoza, to sit on the Ninth Circuit. After we vote on cloture today, Members should expect to vote on his confirmation as early as the beginning of next week. Moving forward, it will be one of our top priorities to confirm as many judges as possible. It is one of the best things we can do with our time here on the floor, especially given how many MAGA-type judges President Trump and the Republican majority appointed.

The lion's share of legal disputes never make it to the Supreme Court, giving those who preside in the lower courts immense power to affect the lives of the American people. And, of course, when they get it wrong—as they have all too frequently recently—the results can be disastrous.

Just yesterday, a hard-right judge in Texas, as I mentioned, stripped away Americans' rights to access preventive care. Over 150 million Americans could now be at risk of losing everything from breast cancer screenings to cholesterol screenings, free vaccinations, mental health assessments, and so much more. Add that to the previous case I mentioned before, and you can see that judges are out of control, far away from what most Americans want, foisted upon us by the Republican Senate majority, President Trump, and a small band of rightwing, MAGA billionaires.

In the long run, this decision could mean more people get sick or die needlessly simply because they can't afford preventive care to stay healthy. That is the kind of thing that is at stake when it comes to judges.

It is a frightening reminder of the difference between our side and the

hard right, the MAGA hard right, the extreme MAGA hard right. Whether through judges or legislation, the hard right remains obsessed—obsessed—with stripping away people's rights to affordable healthcare. It is dangerous. It is malicious. It is wildly out of step with the American people.

Democrats want something different. We want to protect people's healthcare, not destroy it. We want judges who will preserve long-established precedent, not obliterate it, who will move us forward on our fight to equality, not take steps backward. And in the coming weeks and months, we will maintain a laser-like focus on confirming judges who will do the kinds of things that we believe must be done in America.

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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, first this morning, the Senate and the American people are watching the news regarding our friends in the United Kingdom and the health of their beloved Queen Elizabeth.

The Queen is an exemplar of steady leadership and a beloved figure around the world. She has been a historic friend of the United States. The decades of her reign have seen a profound deepening of the special relationship between our two countries that has literally changed the world.

The Queen, the royal family, and all our friends in the United Kingdom have our thoughts and our prayers.

ENERGY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now on a completely different matter, I have been talking all week about the ways that liberal policies hurt American families in their daily lives.

After 2 years of total Democratic control in Washington, we have seen how reckless spending comes home to roost in the form of decades-high inflation and shrinking paychecks for working Americans.

We have seen what happens when one of our two major political parties decides in its rhetoric, in its personnel, and in its policies that keeping our streets safe, our border secure, and

criminals behind bars are simply not their priorities. And despite multiple glaring cautionary tales both at home and abroad, we are seeing the early warning signs of our Democratic colleagues' hostility to an all-of-the-above American energy strategy.

In Europe, some of America's closest allies are reaping the painful effects of years of shortsighted green policies. By swapping affordable and reliable domestic power for half-baked fads, our friends have placed themselves at the mercy of Vladimir Putin to meet demand ahead of another cold winter.

Working families and small businesses are taking this tradeoff on the chin. I saw one shop owner in Ireland explain she has just had to pay almost as much for 2 months of electricity as she did throughout all of last year. Unfortunately, millions of Americans can sympathize. An estimated 20 million U.S. households are already behind on their energy bills thanks to Democrats' runaway inflation.

And out in California, State and local Democrats have wasted no time taking things even further—even further—in the wrong direction. Democrats have made California's electrical grid into a giant experiment to try out all of their misunderstandings about energy policy. It is not going well. With hot weather demand surging, California authorities are sweating political shortfalls of up to 5,000 megawatts. California's love affair with fickle, unreliable green energy could force its residents to put up with rolling blackouts just to conform to wealthy liberals' preferences.

The government had to send out an emergency message begging citizens to ration power. Ironically, just weeks after announcing a future ban on gas-powered automobiles, the State is now begging folks not to charge their expensive electric cars to avoid crashing the grid.

So California Democrats don't want you putting gas in your car; they don't want you to plug in your car either. That is exactly where their war on energy would leave the American people: Going nowhere fast.

President Biden's Secretary of Energy, Secretary Granholm, literally said less than a week ago that:

California is in the lead—

In the lead—

and can show the rest of the nation how it is done.

So at home and abroad, our Democratic colleagues have been given sobering warnings of what not to do on energy. They have seen what happens when you wage war on abundant fossil fuels, abandon nuclear power, and go all in on the least—the least—reliable energy sources.

But this all-Democratic government has spent 2 straight years running head-on toward these bright red flashing warning signals. They have frozen new domestic energy leasing, canceled new pipelines, and reinstated a maze—

a maze—of redtape designed to strangle entire domestic industries.

As gas prices skyrocketed on President Biden's watch, his administration approved less new oil drilling than any since Harry Truman was in office. Our Democratic colleagues have doubled and tripled down. Last month, while they rammed through their reckless taxing-and-spending spree, they voted in lockstep multiple times against Republican amendments that would have helped shore up American energy and rebuild our independence.

Europe in thrall to Putin's gas supply, California talking about rolling blackouts—exactly what further warning do our Democratic colleagues actually need?

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now on another matter, in January 2019, a bipartisan supermajority of the Senate voted for an amendment I authored warning that the "... precipitous withdrawal of United States forces from [Afghanistan] could put at risk hard-won gains and United States national security."

Two years later, senior experts and advisers repeated the same warning to President Biden. His own experts made it clear that a hasty retreat from counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan would lead to the collapse of the Afghan Government.

Those warnings, of course, fell on deaf ears. Thirteen American servicemembers died fulfilling the Biden administration's rush to evacuation. The Taliban now rules again in Kabul, as it did before U.S. forces arrived. Now, 1 year on from last August's disaster, the devastating scale of the fallout from President Biden's decision has come into sharper focus. Afghanistan has become, once again, a global pariah. Its economy has shrunk by nearly a third. Half of its population is now suffering critical levels of food insecurity. Afghan women and girls have had their rights to work, attend school, and live independently torn away under Taliban rule. And just as we feared, just as was predicted, Afghanistan is again becoming a serious haven for terrorists.

The recent American strike that took out al-Qaida's leader al-Zawahiri is a credit to decades of work by the professionals of our intelligence community.

Ah, but the fact that a terrorist kingpin felt comfortable in Kabul just months after America's withdrawal is a damning condemnation of the Biden administration's unjustified confidence that the Taliban could be trusted not to lay out the welcome mat for our most consequential terrorist enemies.

The strike was a success, but the underlying fact that President Biden's policies led this top terrorist to set up shop with impunity right in downtown Kabul is a colossal failure.

In fact, just weeks before the strike that killed Zawahiri, when the admin-

istration already knew full well that the Taliban government and senior Haqqani terrorists were harboring him, the administration still—still—released another hardened terrorist from Guantanamo and returned him into the Taliban's waiting arms.

So al-Qaida is rebuilding under the patronage of the Taliban and the Haqqanis. There is no question that so-called over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations are becoming much more difficult. Senior administration officials have acknowledged that our intelligence about the growing threat is drying up—so is our ability to combat it.

And the damage, the fallout, isn't limited just to Afghanistan itself. America's reckless abandonment has done lasting damage to the coalition partnerships that had made our operations there so successful. President Biden showed America's allies we couldn't be trusted or reasoned with, and he showed our adversaries the weakness of our resolve. There is no question in my mind that Russian, Chinese, and Iranian leaders watched us retreat from Afghanistan and, of course, were emboldened.

I advised three consecutive Presidents not to withdraw from Afghanistan—three of them. I believed a small residual presence was sustainable, would help us keep pressure on the terrorists, and protect us here at home.

Gen. Frank McKenzie, CENTCOM commander during the withdrawal, has said repeatedly that he voiced the very same view to President Biden.

But even now, a year after the President's orders were carried out, the Biden administration continues to shirk accountability and responsibility.

The fact that their haphazard scramble required an unprecedented airlift was not a success; it was a failure. The fact that over a year later, the administration still cannot really account for who they brought into our country, while both Americans and vulnerable Afghan partners still remain in Afghanistan as we speak, is not a success; it is a failure.

President Biden has rejected practically every part of his predecessor's agenda, foreign and domestic, but he pretends he was somehow powerless to alter the previous administration's Doha agreement to pull out of Afghanistan—the one time President Biden decided the previous President had it right. Of course, the truth is that President Biden wanted to withdraw from Afghanistan. He campaigned on it. According to public reports, he spent the entire Obama administration pushing back against the generals' advice not to cut and run. And once in office himself, he pushed ahead.

Senate Republicans will continue to press for accountability, will continue to pursue answers to tough questions about why the Biden administration