

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

ran headfirst—headfirst—into this national embarrassment. Just as importantly, we will also keep pushing to rebuild America's military, both to meet major threats from Russia and China and to defend the terrorist challenges President Biden has left to fester.

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. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Andre B. Mathis, of Tennessee, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Sixth Circuit.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

THE INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, a month ago yesterday, Senate Democrats shoved another partisan spending bill through the Senate—this one, the inaccurately named “Inflation Reduction Act.” I say “inaccurately named” because the so-called Inflation Reduction Act will do nothing to reduce inflation. That is right. The so-called Inflation Reduction Act will not actually reduce inflation. You don't have to take my word for it; the nonpartisan Penn Wharton Budget Model said this about the bill's impact on inflation: “The impact on inflation is statistically indistinguishable from zero”—“statistically indistinguishable from zero.”

Democrats also claim that the bill will lead to deficit reduction, but that is not really true, either. In the first place, Democrats arrive at their deficit reduction assumptions using some extremely fuzzy math. A substantial part of their deficit reduction claims depend on not extending a program that they have already called for extending and on supposedly eliminating a rule that at this point was never going to be implemented anyway.

But even using their rosier assumptions, the deficit reduction they would have achieved with the Inflation Reduction Act was wiped out completely 8 days after the bill was signed by the President's costly, reckless student loan giveaway.

Democrats have clearly been seeing the polling on Americans' opinion of the economy and their lack of faith in President Biden and Democrats to deal with the economic challenges we are facing. That is unquestionably why Democrats named their bill the “Inflation Reduction Act” and touted their commitment to deficit reduction in an attempt to suggest fiscal responsibility. The problem, of course, is that their commitment to deficit reduction, inflation reduction, and fiscal responsibility was and continues to be nothing more than window dressing.

At its core, the Inflation Reduction Act, like the so-called American Rescue Plan before it, is just another big government, big spending piece of legislation. It will do nothing to address the real economic challenges facing our Nation. Instead, it will waste taxpayer dollars on Democrats' big government fantasies. It will drive up energy costs in the service of Democrats' Green New Deal agenda. It will push people off private insurance and into government-run healthcare, driving up the cost to taxpayers. The legislation imposes socialist-style price controls that will discourage medical innovation and reduce the number of new treatments and cures. It imposes new taxes on businesses that will slow economic growth and result in lower wages and fewer jobs. And the list goes on.

In case there was any doubt about their intentions with this bill, Democrats made their priorities very, very clear when the Senate considered amendments. Democrats' so-called Inflation Reduction Act hikes taxes on domestic oil and gas production—something that will unquestionably result in higher energy prices for American families, who are already facing higher energy bills in the Biden economy.

During the amendment vote-arama on this legislation, Democrats made it very clear that they are, indeed, just fine with restricting American energy production and seeing Americans' energy bills soar.

Democrats rejected attempts to ease their tax hikes on domestic oil and gas. They rejected amendments to make it easier for companies to develop American oil and natural gas. They also rejected a comprehensive amendment to reform the burdensome permitting process, which is one of the biggest obstacles to new energy investment. They even rejected an amendment to prevent Democrats' new electric vehicle tax credit from going to wealthy Americans. So apparently it is just fine to support measures that would drive up Americans' energy bills, but electric vehicle tax breaks for wealthy Americans have to be preserved, not to mention the irony of U.S. automakers recently hiking prices on certain electric vehicles by \$6,500 to \$8,000, which roughly matches the \$7,500 tax credit in the Democrats' inflation reduction bill.

Now, I have been a longtime supporter of clean energy, but the fact of

the matter is, clean energy technology has not advanced to a point where we can solely rely on alternative energy. We need oil, we need natural gas, and we will continue to need them for a while yet. Efforts to discourage domestic production of conventional energy will simply drive up energy costs for hard-working Americans and force our country to rely on unstable foreign sources of oil and gas. Now, that may very well be the Democrats' plan in hopes of hastening the arrival of their Green New Deal future.

Democrats like to bill themselves as the party of the little guy, but their track record gives the lie to that. Democrats couldn't bring themselves to support measures to lower Americans' energy bills by increasing domestic oil and gas production because it conflicts with their Green New Deal ideology. They did all unite to protect a tax deduction that mainly goes to wealthy Americans in high-tax States and to make sure, as I mentioned, that wealthy Americans are able to access tax credits for electric vehicles.

Of course, they opposed a measure to prevent more audits of Americans making less than \$400,000 a year. That is right. Democrats' legislation includes tens of billions of dollars for new IRS agents and increased audits. Democrats' hope is that more audits of Americans will help pay for some of their spending measures like increased government healthcare subsidies and their Green New Deal priorities.

The Biden administration put out a statement claiming that this wouldn't mean increased audits of Americans making less than \$400,000 a year, but when Democrats had the opportunity to confirm that by supporting an amendment that would have prevented the new enforcement funds from being used to audit Americans making less than \$400,000 a year, they unanimously—unanimously—voted against it.

I could go on. I haven't even talked about the border security amendments the Democrats opposed. Republicans thought that perhaps, while Democrats were throwing money at environmental justice and climate slush funds and identifying gaps in tree canopy coverage, perhaps they could spare some money for the crisis at our southern border—a crisis that Democrats have largely chosen to pretend doesn't exist. But Democrats quashed any attempt to divert money to address the border crisis. Apparently, identifying gaps in tree canopy coverage is more important than securing our southern border.

Democrats went so far as to oppose—oppose—an amendment that would have prohibited hiring additional IRS agents until additional Customs and Border Protection agents are hired to help secure the border. You heard that right. Now, I am pretty sure Americans are more worried about our border crisis than what Democrats apparently think is an IRS enforcement crisis. But