

the Third Circuit. She would be the fourth circuit judge nominee we would consider since the beginning of this work period.

Let me say that again. We are going to begin considering the fourth circuit court nominee since we returned from the August State work period. I said judges would be a priority, and this is what that looks like.

And it is my intention, as majority leader, to keep the Senate focused on judges this week and beyond. Our fundamental rights and our democracy itself depend on it.

#### RESPECT FOR MARRIAGE ACT

Madam President, now, on marriage, off the Senate floor, my colleagues continue to have good conversations on very important legislation to codify marriage equality into law. Far from being a theoretical exercise, codifying marriage equality would have a dramatic long-term impact on millions of people.

At a time when our rights are under siege, it would be a much needed shield for scores of Americans at risk of discrimination simply because of whom they love.

For many of us in this Chamber—myself included—passing marriage equality would hit home in a very personal way. I want to thank my colleagues from both sides of the aisle—especially Senators BALDWIN, COLLINS, and SINEMA—for all the work they are doing to build support for marriage equality legislation.

Over the past several months, I have given them the time and space they have requested to have these talks because I want their efforts to succeed. I know their work is not yet done, and I encourage them to keep going. I truly hope, for the sake of tens of millions of Americans, that there will be at least 10 Republicans who will vote with us to pass this very important bill.

We cannot forget that a mere decade ago—a mere decade ago—marriage discrimination was the law in much of the country. While we are happy that America has made a lot of progress since then, we are not naive in thinking we can't go backward. As we saw earlier this year, it took the Supreme Court just a few weeks to unravel decades of vital precedent on women's rights, gun safety, and environmental protection. And, of course, Judge Thomas has opened the door for the Court to go even further backward when he is saying that cases like *Obergefell*, which protect marriage equality for now, should be revisited.

So when some Republicans say: Oh, this is unnecessary; it won't happen, remember that is the same thing they said about *Roe*, and look at where we are today. We should protect marriage equality now, well before the MAGA-controlled Supreme Court steps in.

So I encourage my colleagues to continue these conversations. The American people support protecting marriage rights of same-sex marriages by a large margin so let's get it done.

#### CONTINUING RESOLUTION

Madam President, finally, on the legislative front on the CR, both parties must work together to keep the government open beyond the September 30 deadline. As my colleagues know, negotiations continue on a CR to extend funding through about mid-December, which hopefully will give appropriators enough time to draft an omnibus funding package.

I thank Chairman LEAHY, Ranking Member SHELBY, and everyone from both sides working to keep the government open. No one wants to see a shutdown—and I know that includes my Republican colleagues—but in order to avoid a shutdown, Senate Republicans must continue working with us to resolve the issues that remain.

#### 21ST ANNIVERSARY OF SEPTEMBER 11

Madam President, finally, on the 21st anniversary of the horrible day, 9/11, everywhere I go, whenever I am wearing a suit or a sport jacket, I wear this flag pin on my lapel, a small but constant reminder of a promise America made 21 years ago: "Never forget."

It was on that day, September 12, 2001, that having seen the horror, smelling the death in the air, hearing the horrible stories, and seeing hundreds of people lined up with poignant signs that said: "Have you seen my son, Bill?" "Have you seen my mother, Mary?" because no one knew who was alive and who wasn't—on that day, I called on Americans to wear the flag, to display it at their homes, out their windows, or at least wear it on their clothing. I have done so ever since, and every day, I look at that flag, and I think of the people who were lost and the vicious evil of those who perpetrated this awful act.

Yesterday, I joined with the Vice President, Governor Hochul, Mayor Adams, and others to honor the fallen on September 11, to grieve for those who were taken from us, and to affirm that over three decades later, though scarred and battered, our country and our democracy endure.

An eternity can pass, and yet September 11 will always feel like yesterday to me. As clearly as the Presiding Officer sits before me, I still remember what it was like to visit the wreckage a day or 2 later. The destruction, the smell, the noise was nothing like the New York I knew and loved. People, as I mentioned, lined up along the sidewalks hoisting makeshift signs that asked the unthinkable: "Have you seen my daughter?" "Have you seen my father?" Those images, as well as the people I knew who were lost, will never leave me.

Yet in the midst of so much pain on 9/11, America encountered its best self. Ordinary people banded together to do extraordinary things. Taxi drivers, store managers, businessmen, city workers, and everyone in between, abandoned their day jobs and became heroes. They donated blood. They organized prayer vigils.

I will never forget the sight of a shoe store owner along the route, as people

escaped from the towers, handing out shoes, just depleting his entire stock so people could walk home.

People volunteered their time and resources to comfort those in need and rebuild our city to new heights, and the same is true for millions across the country.

And to our first responders and volunteers who worked the pile, we owe you such a special and undying measure of thanks. Among all our heroes of that time, they were among the greatest and the most valiant, and many of them have paid for that with their lives because the toxins that were in the air entered their lungs and digestive systems and caused cancers to the extent we have never known in those age groups before.

That is why we worked so hard in this Chamber to help provide healthcare and help for those who have lost loved ones. When we say that America will "never forget" what happened on 9/11, we mean something far more profound than recalling the memories of that awful day. It is not a passive promise, but it is an active one. It is why, 2 months ago, the Senate worked together to pass the largest expansion of veteran healthcare benefits in decades, to aid the nearly 3 million servicemembers exposed to dangerous toxins while serving in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other places around the world. And it is why we must work to replenish that Ground Zero Fund that helped pay for the healthcare of those who rushed to the towers, and we must replenish that fund in the near future.

And it is why all of us, regardless of party, must work together to defend the American way of life, to protect our precious democracy that the terrorists tried to bring down by violent means.

The world has changed dramatically since that morning that the towers fell, but the need to protect our Nation from threats, foreign and domestic, remain.

Today, 21 years after the worst terrorist attack in U.S. history, let us stay awake to the things we must do if we are to keep our promise to "never forget."

May God bless all those who died on September 11, as well as their families and all our first responders and servicemembers who made the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our great Nation.

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. Madam 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.

#### INFLATION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, tomorrow, the Labor Department will

release the latest monthly update on the Democrats' inflation, but, of course, the American people hardly need government statistics to explain to them that Washington Democrats' reckless spending has sent prices skyrocketing. Working families have been feeling this pain in their pocketbooks every single day. Nearly two-thirds of middle-income Americans say inflation is negatively affecting their finances. An outright majority say they are experiencing "financial hardship." A third of the country says they are struggling to meet basic family needs.

One parent shopping for school supplies recently told reporters:

I had to start early because the prices are so high. . . . Being a parent, I want to give them the world. Sometimes, I wish I could give them more.

But the back-to-school rush isn't the only headache facing working families. Since President Biden and this all-Democratic government took office, prices on grocery store essentials, from meat to produce, have seen double-digit percentage increases. Some household items, like furniture, are over 20 percent more expensive than they were on Inauguration Day. The diesel fuel that moves practically everything through the supply chain and onto store shelves is up nearly 80 percent since President Biden put his hand on the Bible. Households' electric bills are up an average of 20 percent since January of 2021. Commuting and running errands costs more, with gasoline up 70 percent. As fall and winter approach, homes that burn fuel oil are set to be more than 75 percent more expensive simply to keep warm.

The American people know who created this mess. They remember quite well how Washington Democrats spent the spring of 2021 dining out on left-wing spending and leaving taxpayers to pick up the bill. Poll after poll has shown they are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with what President Biden and his party have done since then.

One survey found five consecutive times that more than 70 percent of Americans say our country is headed in the wrong direction. But that hasn't stopped Washington Democrats from calling the same disastrous play over and over and over again.

For months—months—our colleagues' primary focus was on repeating the mistake they made in 2021. In August, on a party-line vote, they did it. In the teeth of the worst inflation in over 40 years, every single Democrat in Congress voted to ram through hundreds of billions of dollars more in liberal spending.

The American people's top concern is runaway costs. And the supply chain crisis could get even worse—much worse—in the next few days if Democrats let their far-left, Big Labor allies engage in massive railway worker strikes that would hamper the economy even further. But Washington Democrats' top concerns appear to be something very different. They

prioritized waging war on affordable American energy in a bill that will have no meaningful impact on global temperatures. They prioritized inflating the IRS with \$80 billion to audit more American citizens without a word of accountability for when tax collectors allow confidential information to become a political weapon.

Even the supposed reason for the spending package, "inflation reduction," is utter nonsense. Nonpartisan experts have concluded that what Washington Democrats did last month will not meaningfully reduce inflation at all and will actually make it worse in the near term. This is what Democrats decided to put first for the better part of a year, and it is what they are now trying to peddle to the American people as a victory.

But the American people don't want tens of billions of dollars in wish fulfillment for climate activists; they want affordable gas and electricity. The American people don't want a bloated IRS; they want stronger support for law enforcement at the southern border and in their communities. Washington Democrats have consistently misunderstood what the American people have asked them to do. They have repeatedly ignored the basic challenges they have created for working families.

When the American people's priorities and Washington Democrats' priorities have diverged, this government has put the people last at every turn.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

#### INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, more than a year ago, a news website by the name of ProPublica published stories that it claims are based on "a vast trove of Internal Revenue Service data on the tax returns of thousands of the nation's wealthiest people, covering more than 15 years." Since then, ProPublica has continued to publish articles that appear to use data leaked or hacked from the IRS.

Despite questions from Congress and immediate expressions of concern from the Treasury Department, as well as the IRS, we don't know any more today than we did a year ago. Even though these apparent leaks of confidential taxpayer information appear to target the wealthy, not just the wealthy but all taxpayers and anyone who cares about effective tax administration should be very concerned. The fact is, until we get answers, we don't know if anyone's tax return or other information submitted to the IRS is actually secure.

At the end of the 2022 filing system, more than 145 million individual income tax returns had been filed with the IRS. Right now, we don't know if there is a current vulnerability to the IRS's systems that makes this personal information accessible within the IRS or to bad actors outside of the IRS. We do not know if a foreign nation with hostile intentions is responsible for a

leak or a hack of taxpayer information or the full scope of the IRS's information that may be involved. Just because ProPublica hasn't found it politically useful to publicly disclose your private taxpayer information doesn't mean that your tax information hasn't been compromised.

As I said earlier, in June of 2021, concern was immediately expressed in the Congress and at the Treasury Department. Almost on that very day, Commissioner Rettig appeared before the Finance Committee. In fact, it was on that very day that the first story was published.

Commissioner Rettig said:

I think that trust and confidence in the Internal Revenue Service is sort of the bedrock of asking people and requiring people to provide financial information, and we have, as I said, turned it over to the appropriate investigators, external and internal.

Attorney General Garland was quoted as saying:

This is an extremely serious matter. People are entitled, obviously, to great privacy with respect to their tax returns.

With this level of concern expressed so quickly, now a year ago, you would expect action to have been taken quickly. If you expected that, you would be wrong. Despite several letters sent by this Senator and other Members of Congress, we don't know any more today about what happened than we did last year on June 8, when this situation began.

When testifying before the House Ways and Means Committee, Secretary Yellen said:

I am as anxious as you are to find out what happened.

As a strong proponent of congressional oversight—as I am—of the executive branch, I have always been frustrated when the executive refuses to share relevant information that we need in Congress and are entitled under the Constitution to have. Secretary Yellen's statement suggests a more disturbing possibility where the executive branch completely lacks the sought-after information. Now, consider how shocking it is if the Secretary of the Treasury actually has no insight or any knowledge into a possible massive leak or hack of taxpayer information that occurred under her watch.

In order to determine if any action had been taken, I, along with other Republican members of the Judiciary Committee, wrote to Attorney General Garland and FBI Director Wray on June 24 of this year to ask what the status was of any investigation. This was the second time we tried to get this information.

I know the Department of Justice is capable of taking action quickly when the Department of Justice wants to. I have written to the Attorney General several times about the memo that he issued in response to a letter from the National School Boards Association. That school board letter compared parents to domestic terrorists. It took the Department of Justice only 5 days,