

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,

which included a weekend, to inject Federal law enforcement into local debates with concerned parents.

Clearly, the Attorney General is capable of taking action very quickly, but that seems to only be when an administrative priority is of concern. I hope the Biden administration and the Garland Department of Justice would be as concerned about the protection of confidential taxpayer information as they are about monitoring concerned parents who testify before a school board.

If the Department of Justice and the FBI want to show that they take the confidentiality of taxpayer information seriously, they can start by fully and completely responding to my letter of June 24, which hasn't yet been responded to. More than a full year, with a complete filing season, is too much time to have gone by without having any information on this leaking of taxpayer information being provided to any extent.

Democrats constantly spoke of the need for fairness in the tax system as they pushed through partisan tax-and-spending bills. Yet we have heard barely a peep out of our Democratic colleagues on what may be the largest unauthorized disclosure of taxpayer information in history.

While we continue to wait for answers, we have learned of another massive breach of taxpayer information.

On the first Friday of September, we learned the IRS mistakenly published on its website private information from about 120,000 taxpayers. According to Politico, the disclosure consisted of "details from business tax returns filed by tax-exempt organizations and retirement accounts, included people's names, business contact information and income produced by certain investments."

Clearly, the ability of the IRS to safeguard taxpayer information is still an ongoing issue.

This new revelation should light a very big fire underneath the FBI to get at the bottom of the ProPublica leak or hack. Attorney General Garland and FBI Director Wray must fully respond to my letter and help all of us really understand if our tax system is safe and secure.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER** (Ms. DUCKWORTH). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER**. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EGYPT

Mr. MURPHY. Madam President, Egypt is one of America's closest allies. Our taxpayers send them more direct funding for their military than we send almost any other nation in the world.

But here is what happens to political opponents of the Egyptian regime when they get arrested—and they get arrested at a dizzying rate and get sent to the infamous Tora prison. Arrivals there are blindfolded and then are forced to run through a human corridor of guards who pummel them with sticks until they collapse.

Following this initiation for political prisoners, many of them are routinely beaten and tortured for months or years on end, often with no formal charges being filed. Some never make it out alive.

Human rights groups estimate that there are around 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt.

I get it. The big numbers sometimes lose their meaning in this place. But, by comparison, estimates are that Russia has 420. China likely has around a thousand. Egypt locks up 60,000 political opponents of the regime.

To keep up with the demand of President El-Sisi's imprisonment spree, the country has had to build 60 new detention centers over the last decades. These prisons house some of the country's most prominent human rights defenders, journalists, opposition leaders, but also just ordinary people who are locked up for years because they just attended a protest or they liked a Facebook post or they recorded a TikTok video.

Let me tell you a story of just one of these 60,000 people. Right now, one of my constituents is suffering through the pain and uncertainty of having a relative unjustly imprisoned in Egypt. Muhammad Amasha is studying at Yale University, pursuing his Ph.D. Meanwhile, his father, Dr. Ahmed Amasha, was imprisoned in Egypt from 2017 to 2019 and rearrested and jailed again in June of 2020. According to the U.N., his detention seems "to constitute [an act of reprisal] against Dr. Amasha for documenting cases of enforced disappearances for the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations."

Since his arrest in 2020, Dr. Amasha reportedly has endured abuse during his interrogations that resulted in broken ribs and other significant injuries. His abuse included rape, electrocution, threats to rape his wife, and physical abuse while blindfolded. He was forced to sign a written confession during his time of abuse.

Since President El-Sisi came to power in 2013, more than a thousand people have died in Egyptian custody. Fourteen percent of those deaths were torture. More than 70 percent are because of a denial of healthcare.

This isn't an adversary of the United States. This is Egypt, our ally. Every day that we continue to send billions of dollars to the Egyptian Government, while paying lip service to these egregious human rights violations, it is a blow both to our Nation's character and to our credibility around the world.

For the last several years, I fought to change our Egypt policy, and for the

first time, in fiscal year 2021, we conditioned, with no waiver, \$75 million of Egypt's \$1.3 billion military aid package on "making clear and consistent progress on releasing political prisoners and providing detainees with due process of law." Because there is no waiver, the administration either has to certify that Egypt has made this progress to merit the release of the money or that they haven't made that progress and withhold the money.

The record is clear that they have not. Let me just provide one way of measuring "clear and consistent progress" on releasing political prisoners. A group of Egyptian human rights organizations submitted a list of 2,954 known political prisoners to the government's Presidential Pardon Committee earlier this year. These are people who should not be in jail. They simply protested the government. And if you are going to be an ally of the United States, you shouldn't be locking people up for political speech. But of those 2,954 detainees, the government released 49. That is not "clear and consistent progress."

Another metric: Since April, Egypt's terrorism courts have ordered the release of 417 prisoners. But over that same time period, at least 4,400 political prisoners have had their detentions renewed by the courts. That is not "clear and consistent progress." It is progress, but it is always one step forward and two or three steps backward, at best.

Egypt has certainly not made the kind of progress required to merit the release of \$75 million.

In addition to that piece of funding tied to political prisoners, Congress has also tied an additional \$225 million of Egypt's military aid to "sustained and effective steps" to improving Egypt's human rights record—a broader record of human rights abuses. The statute lays out that, in order to receive this money, Egypt needs to allow NGOs and the media to operate freely, protect women and religious minorities, hold security forces accountable when they violate human rights, and investigate and prosecute these cases of forced disappearances.

Again, the record is overwhelmingly clear that things in Egypt have gotten worse on these fronts, not better, over the last year. Journalists are regularly still charged with "joining a terrorist group" or "spreading false news" for any critical reporting. Just last week, four journalists from the independent outlet Mada Masr were charged with a single news article that documented corruption within a political party close to the President.

Earlier this year, human rights lawyer Youssef Mansour was charged with "inciting terrorism" after he wrote a social media post denouncing prison conditions.

Egypt is also not content with imprisoning its critics at home but increasingly is pursuing its critics abroad. News reports emerged in December that a prominent opposition