

news, the stuff you didn't hear. Let me do Paul Harvey on Senator SANDERS.

The railroad workers today get 3 weeks paid leave on average, plus 11 paid vacation days. PEB made a recommendation that they get 1 additional paid leave day. We will add that in. That is almost a month of paid leave. Regardless of what you call it, there is a month there.

You now mentioned this wasn't as lucrative as Germany and UK. I was home all of August. Nobody was asking: Geez, can you pass legislation that makes us look more like the UK or Germany or the rest of Europe? And I would be willing to bet that 27 paid leave days probably is more than some of the European countries.

Mr. SANDERS. Would you like to bet on that?

Mr. BURR. I will turn to you when I finish, how about that? I gave you a gracious amount of time.

The PEB board determined this was a good solution. And Senator SANDERS says he is here looking out for the middle class because nobody does that. Tell me this: How are you looking out for the middle class when you are risking losing \$2 billion a day in economic activity? Some of those people that you are talking about standing up for, if this rail strike continues, they are going to lose their job because of you. They are going to lose their job because the President took a position and you didn't support him.

I have been amazed with this administration. I find it pretty difficult sitting up here taking the President's position because the CDC today, 78 percent of the CDC workforce does not show up at the office more than 2 days a month. We are in the middle of COVID. We have a monkeypox national medical emergency, and 78 percent of CDC employees—Centers for Disease Control—do not go to the office in Atlanta. As a matter of fact, by, I think, the New York Times report, even the Secretary doesn't go into the office. At a time where you ought to have leadership, the leadership is gone.

Let's give the President a little bit of credit. He is showing some leadership. He realizes this is not good for every American. It doesn't matter whether you are rich or poor or in the middle. Having \$2 billion a day of negative economic impact is not good. It will ruin people's lives, just like COVID, just like monkeypox has done to some Americans.

I am not sure how in good conscience you can roll the dice and say: Boy, 24-percent increase in pay retroactive to 2020—not 2022, 2020—\$1,000 bonus, and 27 paid leave days per year, somehow we are cheating them. It is beyond me.

But an objection has been heard, and now it means this is in Senator SCHUMER's hands. He is the majority leader. He can bring this legislation up on the floor. All he needs is 60 votes because I am convinced, after hearing Senator SANDERS, he is not going to have an epiphany tonight and wake up tomorrow and say: I was wrong, I am for this.

But here is the promise I will make to Senator SCHUMER. If he will bring it to the floor, I will produce 48 Republican votes for it. That means Democrats only need to produce 12 people to support it to keep the American people from having a \$2 billion-a-day economic impact negatively impacting them. It will keep the flow of goods from the east coast to the west coast, and Amtrak will open up again. Christmas that comes in from overseas will hit L.A., Seattle, everywhere, and it will make it to its retail location where my wife can buy it. You could probably squeeze 12 Democratic votes just out of coastal communities that have ports that are going to be the real loser in this.

Remember, not long ago we had a port problem. We had ships that were sitting off L.A. that couldn't unload, and we felt the impact of it. Well, if you thought that was bad, wait until there are no trains because then they will be unloading no ships. They are all going to sit off the shore. When they back up like that, that backs up further and further when these goods are going to come in because once they unload here, they are going to go back and get more.

It also means that what we export in this country, there are no containers and no ships coming in to export those goods. If you are in agricultural territory at harvest time, this is going to be devastating to you. There are 160 million freight cars of agriculture transported every year, and it happens in this period.

So I say to my colleagues, let's all hope that Senator SCHUMER will bring this up, that he will take Republicans up on their position of supporting the President and a solution to this problem, and that all he needs to do is produce 12 folks, and at any point, we can pass this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. I was not aware Senator BURR was a railroad worker, so let me, just to set the record straight, tell you what the railroad workers themselves understand the situation is. We might want to listen to those who live the experience. So let me very briefly quote you a statement from Jeremy Ferguson, president of SMART Transportation Division, and Dennis Pierce, president, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, Teamsters Rail Conference.

This is what they say about their working conditions:

Penalizing engineers and conductors for getting sick or going to a doctor's visit with termination must be stopped as part of this contract settlement. Let us repeat that, our members are being terminated for getting sick or for attending routine medical visits as we crawl our way out of a worldwide pandemic. No working-class American should be treated with this level of harassment in the workplace for simply becoming ill or going to a routine medical visit.

That is from the unions themselves.

So let us be clear. I don't think anybody wants a strike or wants a lockout. We hope that a settlement will be reached in the next day. But, in my view, if we are going to reach a settlement, I would hope that the railroads, which are making huge profits, start treating their workers with the respect that they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, I appreciate the debate on this. Here is where we are on this issue. We are going to have a nationwide strike within a day and a half from now, midnight, 12:01 a.m., Friday.

There are two things that could stop this. The distinguished majority leader can bring this PEB recommendation to the floor, and we will produce the Republican votes to get President Biden's administration's recommendation enacted. Send it to the House. The other thing that can happen is for President Biden to do as I have called on him to do just a few moments ago—to make it clear that this is, in fact, his recommendation, his endorsement of the plan that has been put forward by the Board he appointed; make that clear and exercise the Presidential leadership that is needed at this point to persuade his friends and the four holdout unions that this is what needs to be done.

But that is where we are. If we don't have one of those two actions, then we will have done nothing, and we will see a strike and the economic devastation that the distinguished Senator from North Carolina has described. It is really up to the Democratic leader and the President of the United States.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I am very pleased to be on the floor today with my colleague Senator HIRONO to express our strong support for the nomination of Dr. Geeta Rao Gupta to be Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues at the Department of State.

The position that Dr. Gupta has been nominated for leads the Office of Global Women's Issues, which is charged with advancing the rights and empowerment of women and girls around the world through U.S. foreign policy, so looking at our foreign policy through a gender lens that recognizes that women are half of the world's population.

Not only does the Office of Global Women's Issues prioritize policies and programs to advance the status of women around the world, it ensures that U.S. policies incorporate a gender lens at all levels of policy and decision making.

The last 2½ years of the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated why this office is more important than ever before. Around the world over those last

2½ years, the gender gap has grown as a result of the pandemic. Girls are dropping out and staying out of school at a higher rate than boys. The female labor force participation rate has declined, with women not only holding less secure jobs but also taking on more unpaid work at home with childcare and housing.

Gender-based violence has increased to such an extent that UN Women, the U.N. body charged with advancing the rights of women globally, now warns of what they call a “shadow pandemic” of violence.

These are issues of great consequence to half of the world’s population. They cannot be an afterthought. Gender equity, equality, and the empowerment of women and girls must be a focal point of U.S. foreign policy, and that is exactly what the Ambassador at Large is intended to facilitate.

Unfortunately, this position has been unfilled for too long. Over the past 5 years, beginning in the Trump administration, the position of the Ambassador at Large for Global Women’s Issues has been filled for only 1 year, so 20 percent of the time over the last 5 years.

During that time, we have endured an unprecedented global pandemic. We have ended a 20-year war in Afghanistan. We have watched as Vladimir Putin launched an unprovoked attack on Ukraine. We have experienced a supply chain crisis and suffered a global food shortage. And in every single one of these crises, women have been more acutely affected than men and affected in a different way than men.

During the pandemic, women, who make up almost 70 percent of the healthcare workforce, have been those who have been on the frontlines of providing care for the sick and vulnerable.

With the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, women’s rights have been rolled back at an unprecedented rate, and we have seen—90 percent of the households in Afghanistan have food insecurity, and women are experiencing the greatest part of that.

Displacement from the war in Ukraine has left millions of women vulnerable to human trafficking, even as Russia continues to shell their homes and communities.

The food insecurity from the supply chain crisis and global food shortage has reinforced our understanding of what we have seen for too long: that in times of hunger, it is women who eat last and who eat the least.

Through all of these crises, the Office of Global Women’s Issues has been without a leader to spearhead its work to ensure that women’s needs are incorporated in every aspect of the U.S. response to these crises. Now, why does that matter? Well, not only do women make up 50 percent of the world’s population, but what we know is that where women are empowered, they contribute, give back more to their families. They give back more to their communities. The countries that empower women are more stable; they are more economically secure.

This is a policy that is important not only to our foreign policy writ large but to our national security. That is why we need to fill this position and why we urgently need to confirm Dr. Gupta.

Dr. Gupta has spent her career in service to gender equality and women’s empowerment. She knows better than most the impact that unfair gender norms and inequalities have on women and the importance of prioritizing women’s leadership.

What is so unfortunate is that Dr. Gupta is being punished for her personal views on women’s reproductive choices. As the result of those personal views, those groups who oppose women’s reproductive choices are spreading falsehoods instead of facts. They are doing that, and unfortunately, too many of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle have been willing to listen to those falsehoods without really looking at the facts. This sets a very dangerous precedent for all future nominees.

Let me be clear. The Office of Global Women’s Issues does not lead on sexual and reproductive health and rights, nor does it provide information about abortion services.

When former President Trump nominated someone to lead the Office of Global Women’s Issues, I and my pro-choice colleagues in this body didn’t ask her what her position was on choice because we knew that was not the mission of the Office of Global Women’s Issues, and she was confirmed. And I think by all accounts, people thought she did a good job in the short time that she was there.

So why are my Republican colleagues spreading these falsehoods? They have said that Dr. Gupta has advised the World Health Organization to support abortion as a human right. They have alleged that Dr. Gupta gave a speech saying that abortion should be an essential service. They have alleged that the administration has plans to include abortion in the mandate of the Office of Global Women’s Issues. Let me be clear. There is no truth behind those allegations.

If you missed it, let me say it again. There is no truth behind those allegations.

We cannot let this idea that because somebody has a personal position on an issue that affects them, that that means they cannot be considered for a position within the government. You know, based on that criteria, I wouldn’t be able to be considered for any position.

So for the sake of Dr. Gupta’s nomination today and for the sake of all of those qualified women candidates who are going to come before the Senate in the future, we can’t let this divisive move become the status quo. We have to correct the record. We need to approve Dr. Gupta, and we need to get the Office of Global Women’s Issues back operating at full capacity.

With that, let me yield to my colleague from Hawaii, Senator HIRONO.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. I rise today in support of Dr. Gita Rao Gupta’s nomination to serve as Ambassador at Large for Global Women’s Issues, and I am glad to be here with my friend from New Hampshire to argue for her confirmation.

As head of the State Department’s Office of Global Women’s Issues, the Ambassador at Large leads our diplomatic efforts to promote the rights and empowerment of women and girls around the world. Who can argue with that kind of a mission?

From supporting women’s economic participation to combating domestic and gender-based violence, this work is critically important, and Dr. Gupta is well-suited to take on this important task. Dr. Gupta has spent her life working to empower women across the globe. She has led several nonprofit organizations focused on advancing gender equity and has served as cochair of the World Bank’s Gender-Based Violence Task Force.

But for months now, Republicans have blocked consideration of her nomination. Why? Not because she is unqualified. Dr. Gupta’s record is impeccable, and her qualifications are clear. No, Republicans are blocking her nomination simply because she supports the fundamental right of all women to make decisions about their bodies and their futures, including the decision to get an abortion.

Apparently, it is no longer enough for my Republican colleagues to push their extreme anti-abortion agenda. Now that they have overturned *Roe v. Wade*, they are opposing anyone who expresses support for abortion access even if it is their personal view and not one they are going to be pushing forward in the position that we are being asked to confirm them for.

Last year, the Republicans did the same thing to President Biden’s nominee to be Deputy Administrator of the Small Business Administration, SBA, opposing his nomination because of their opposition to SBA’s totally lawful PPP loans to Planned Parenthood clinics providing critical healthcare to communities across the country.

The Republicans, I have to say, have been on a tear about “How dare SBA provide these lawful PPP loans to Planned Parenthood?” Apparently, it escapes their notice that these are lawful loans.

So Republicans’ opposition to Dr. Gupta’s confirmation is a dangerous position and one that threatens the health, safety, and prosperity of women here in the United States and around the world.

For example, my Republican colleagues raised concerns about the state of women and girls in Afghanistan, and yet in another example of their hypocrisy, they are opposing a nominee who would be in a position to actually help support these women.

As Ambassador at Large for Global Women’s Issues, Dr. Gupta will bring

decades of experience to empower women, improve their economic security, and end violence against women and girls.

There is no legitimate reason for anyone to not support her nomination to this important role. The chaos and fear across the country generated by the Supreme Court's Roe decision is spilling over to block this nomination.

I thank Senator SHAHEEN for her focus on Dr. Gupta's nomination and her dedication to women and girls at home and abroad, and I urge my Republican colleagues to do the right thing for a change and end their bad faith obstruction of Dr. Gupta's nomination.

I yield back to my colleague from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Thank you, Senator HIRONO, and thank you for your eloquent remarks about Dr. Gupta's qualifications and the importance of having someone who has those kinds of qualifications at the Office of Global Women's Issues.

At this time, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee be discharged and the Senate proceed to the following nomination: PN1578, Geeta Rao Gupta, to be Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues; that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; and that any related statements be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. HAGERTY. Reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. HAGERTY. Dr. Gupta received a tie vote in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. There is a Senate process that has been agreed to by both parties by which the leader can discharge a nomination with a tie vote from this committee to bring it before the full Senate, if he so chooses.

I am saying this as a person who has been put through 30 hours of cloture himself when I served in the executive branch and went through this very process.

We should not break from Senate process and procedure with regard to Dr. Gupta's nomination. Members should have the opportunity to vote, and the majority leader can schedule it.

Additionally, I think the vast majority of Senators from both sides value the economic empowerment of women everywhere around the globe. The previous administration made economic empowerment for women worldwide one of its signature initiatives.

I served as a diplomat at that time in the previous administration, and the senior Senator from New Hampshire was a valuable partner in many of our efforts, which I very much appreciate.

So I think that there is a goal we share, but there are valid concerns on our side that the current administration is tainting this worthy goal and dismantling the bipartisan achievements of the previous administration. We deserve to have a better understanding of what this administration is doing before we rush ahead and totally bypass the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to confirm the person who will be the chief implementer of this administration's policies.

I am not comfortable giving consent to expedite consideration of this nomination.

Therefore, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I can buy that answer. Senator HAGERTY and I have worked together on the Foreign Relations Committee. I voted for you to be an Ambassador. I thought you did a good job in that role, and I think you are doing a good job now.

But the fact is that taking up floor time to deal with qualified nominees at a time when we have limited floor time, when we have a position that needs to be filled, when we have a minority position on the Foreign Relations Committee in opposition to authorizing permanently the Office of Global Women's Issues tells me it is something more than that, and I think Dr. Gupta's stalled nomination is emblematic of the intransigence on confirming President Biden's nominees for the Department of State.

That obstructionism is undermining our diplomatic efforts. It is demoralizing to employees at the Department of State who have dedicated their lives to U.S. foreign policy, and I know you understand that because you headed an Embassy. You know how critical our employees are who manage our foreign policy.

Eric Rubin, a former Ambassador to Bulgaria, recently spelled out what this means for U.S. diplomacy and national security, and this is the concern that we all ought to have.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD this article from Puck News.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[Sept. 6, 2022]

WASHINGTON'S NEW CRISIS OF DIPLOMACY
(By Julia Ioffe)

As of this writing, it has been 593 days since an American ambassador has inhabited the Villa Taverna, their official residence in Rome. Ever since the financier and Republican donor Lewis Eisenberg moved out at the end of Donald Trump's administration on January 21, 2021, no one has replaced him. President Joe Biden never nominated anyone, which raised eyebrows both in American foreign policy circles and in Italy. The Romans I've spoken to are furious and see it as a sign of unprecedented disrespect, especially at a time when Washington is asking its European allies—including countries dependent on Russian gas, like Italy—to hold

the line on anti-Russian sanctions. "It's the only G7 country with no U.S. ambassador," one American diplomatic insider told me. "I know the Italians are unhappy and they should be, given the situation politically and what's going on with Russia." Given that Russia is rumored to have had a hand in the collapse of Mario Draghi's sanctions-friendly coalition government this summer, the fact that Washington doesn't have a representative on the ground is more than embarrassing. It's downright negligent.

Currently, the United States is represented in Italy by Shawn Crowley, who is the chargé d'affaires. That's fine, but a chargé doesn't have the same rank and status as an ambassador, and receiving countries have all kinds of protocols and rules about who can meet with whom. Usually, a chargé has a much lower ceiling for whom they can meet than an ambassador; the rank itself can be quite limiting. "The Italians," noted the diplomatic insider, "are very protocol conscious." As are the Ukrainians—so much so that, despite all the aid the U.S. has poured into his country, President Volodymyr Zelensky refused to meet with the American chargé d'affaires until a real American ambassador, Bridget Brink, arrived in Kyiv this May.

Why has Biden left the post in Rome unfilled for so long? It's been an open secret in Washington that the president is holding the spot for Nancy Pelosi, the first Italian-American Speaker of the House and a minor celebrity in Italy. The idea, apparently, was to give her a nice, cushy retirement gig after Republicans take over the House. But why not nominate someone, like a career foreign service officer, to serve in the post, and then shoo them out once Pelosi ripens to the idea? All ambassadors, after all, serve at the pleasure of the president. I asked spokespeople at both the State Department and the White House about this, but they wouldn't—and couldn't—explain to me, even off the record, what the hell is going on there, not even after Fox News published its own story about the Pelosi rumors on Tuesday.

Pelosi's people, meanwhile, offered a familiar line: Why would Pelosi go get another job when she could just retire to Napa, and play with her grandkids? "Fox is just trying to start shit," one source close to the speaker told me. "There are no conversations with the White House. And I've just heard [Pelosi] say 'S.F. is heaven on earth' one too many times to believe that she would realistically want to spend her post-Speaker life anywhere but home with family." Which is also the exact kind of thing you might say before you take a job like that.

The Italian imbroglio is just the tip of the diplomatic iceberg. Over a year and a half into Biden's administration, more than 20 percent of American ambassadorships remain unfilled. Nearly 40 of them have a nominee that is pending confirmation, including for strategically vital posts, like the Czech Republic, Latvia, and the Netherlands—all crucial allies in holding the line against Russia on Ukraine. There is no American ambassador in Saudi Arabia, a fraught but important ally, and there hasn't been one since Biden's inauguration. India, the world's largest democracy, hasn't had an American ambassador since then either. The current nominee, L.A. mayor Eric Garcetti, has been in confirmation purgatory for more than a year, held up over allegations that he knew about his chief of staff's alleged sexual predations. In limbo, too, is the nomination for the ambassador to the U.N.'s Conference on Disarmament. Apparently, the U.S. Senate does not consider nuclear disarmament a pressing matter.

Fifteen more posts are completely vacant, with no nominee anywhere in sight. The abandonment of some places, like Cuba and

Afghanistan, make some sense. Other places, like Ethiopia, or Estonia, which is a crucial NATO ally, do not. "There is no reasonable explanation for why more than 20 percent of our ambassadorships overseas remain unfilled," said Eric Rubin, president of the American Foreign Service Association, which tracks such things. "This is not a world in which we can coast and assume that the rest of the world will wait for us to sort out our parochial difficulties. No other country leaves key diplomatic posts vacant so frequently and for so long."

The problem, though, is that there is an explanation. In fact, there are several. It began with Trump gutting the State Department and the career foreign service. The people he had nominated to represent the United States were comically unqualified if not outright problematic. Once Biden came in, Washington expected him to right the ship. He had been, after all, an old member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a vice president that had handled some of the most complex foreign policy matters under President Barack Obama. He boasted about his foreign policy chops as well as the coterie of smart, experienced advisors he was bringing in with him: the best and the brightest.

And yet, here we are, more than a year and a half later, and one-fifth of the president's ambassadors remain unconfirmed or even unappointed. The first problem for Biden was the Presidential Personnel Office, which, in true Democratic fashion, decided that if the previous administration was going to nominate people with criminal records or ongoing lawsuits for ambassadorships, they were going to do things with extra diligence. Chief of staff Ron Klain also decided he had to vet every single nominee, too, slowing the process even further. Meanwhile, over in Foggy Bottom, the State Department decided that its people also had to be extra vetted by diplomatic security, because everyone now had a digital footprint and social media presence.

Then, last July, Texas Senator Ted Cruz took it upon himself to wage a one-man campaign to kill the Nord Stream II project by putting a blanket hold on all the Biden administration's State Department nominees unless the White House got the German government to kill its pipeline. Since the Biden administration was not about to do so, this created a massive backlog—and that was before Missouri's Josh Hawley instituted his own blanket hold, in September 2021, on State and Defense Department nominees unless Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan resigned for, in his view, bungling the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Needless to say that never happened. By the time these holds were lifted early this year, the backlog had grown massive. And time on the floor of the Senate of the 117th Congress, which will gavel out on January 3, 2023, had grown ever more precious.

But before that, let's pause to talk about how ambassadorial nominees get to the floor of the Senate for a vote.

First, they have to be approved by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which is currently headed by New Jersey's Bob Menendez, a Democrat, and Idaho's Jim Risch, a Republican. Both men are steeped in foreign affairs and appear to all outside observers as serious thinkers about world events. But according to people who have regular dealings with the Foreign Relations Committee, they have a relationship that is closer to something out of *Mean Girls*. They are, as one source familiar with the committee described them to me, "like oil and water." They have been known to be so laser-focused on messing with each other, in

fact, that they regularly inhibit the functioning of the Committee. Said one Senate staffer familiar with the workings of the Committee, "It's an open secret that the challenges in their working relationship often impedes us from working together constructively on foreign policy and national security issues."

But there are other issues for ambassadorial nominees to navigate inside the Committee, especially if they're female. There is only one woman senator on the committee, New Hampshire's Jeanne Shaheen, and so the women Biden has nominated often run up against the proclivities of the old men of the Senate, especially of the Republican persuasion. "There is certainly a layer of unconscious bias that is holding back a number of women, that isn't there for the male nominees," said the Senate staffer. This includes "spouses saying things about Trump" or "the way in which women talk and represent themselves, where Republicans have been viscerally opposed to just how the women communicate." According to two sources, Sarah Margon, who had run the Washington office of Human Rights Watch and was nominated to lead the State Department's Office of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, ran into trouble when she met with Senator Risch, who pressed her repeatedly on her position on the BDS movement. She opposed it, she said repeatedly. Afterwards, Risch told colleagues he didn't like Margon's tone. (A committee spokesperson contended that, "The issue was not and has never been her 'tone,' it was her answers to the questions themselves.") The spokesperson did not, however, explain what was wrong with the answers.)

Other women have been pressed by Committee Republicans on their stances on abortion, even if the position they are nominated for has nothing to do with women's health, let alone abortion. This happened, for example, with Dr. Geeta Gupta, who was nominated to be the Ambassador to the Office of Global Women's Issues. The post, and the office, deals with women's security and economic empowerment, and has nothing to do with women's health, let alone reproductive rights. Yet Gupta was held up by Republicans on the Foreign Relations Committee over her alleged support of abortion, sending Shaheen into a righteous fury. "Republican grandstanding that held Geeta Gupta's nomination from advancing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July is a pivotal example of this gross display of partisan politics," Shaheen said in an email. "Republicans prevented her nomination from proceeding to fill the urgently needed role as Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues because of their obsession over women's health and access to abortion—neither of which are under the jurisdiction of this role. Senate Republicans are putting our security in danger and our credibility on the world stage at risk—it needs to end now."

The guiding assumption seems to be that if they are women and Democrats, then they are automatically rabid abortionists and will use whatever diplomatic role to advocate for it, from Kyiv to Kinshasa. "Women nominees tend to face more rigor from Senate Republicans and are frequently questioned about extraneous issues like their views on abortion," another Senate Democratic aide told me. "Some of this happens in public during hearings, but the majority of times it takes place behind closed doors when there are no cameras around to catch a senator and his staff go after women over issues well beyond the scope of the position for which they were nominated."

Once upon a time, ambassadorial nominees could count on cruising through the Senate on a vote of unanimous consent. They would

be advanced as a block of nominees and voted through as a block, and people would only get singled out if they had truly bungled their meetings with senators. The feeling at the time was that the President of the United States deserved to pick his ambassadors just as he deserved to pick his cabinet secretaries and the Senate was there only to weed out the truly rotten apples.

No more. If a nominee even makes it out of committee for a floor vote, they are voted on individually, it takes several hours, and any senator can use the opportunity of their nomination to extract something from the administration. Some, like Hawley, have asked for the resignation of cabinet secretaries. Others have asked for small, stupid things like, for example, a visa for a friend in exchange for waving a nomination through. That is to be expected of Republicans who will do whatever they can to impede Biden's agenda, but even some Democrats have caught on to the game. They have also learned that they can use any nomination to extract some choice morsel from the administration, whether it's a pet issue or something they can flaunt to constituents back home.

As a result, every single State Department confirmation hearing, ambassadorial or otherwise, now resembles a hostage negotiation. "This is not how the system is supposed to work," said one insider the process. "You're not supposed to negotiate for individual unrelated reasons. But people have started treating this as normal. I think nominations will look like this forever from now on."

Because of this, and because there are only four working weeks left on the Senate calendar before the midterms, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has made it crystal clear to his conference that ambassadorial nominees are now at the very back of the line. Why spend hours on the ambassador to Azerbaijan when you can ram through another lifetime judicial appointment to balance out the work done by Mitch McConnell when he had the majority? "You only have a certain number of hours a week," one Senate aide familiar with the process told me. "The more we're spending it on ambassadorial nominations, the less we're spending it on judges." Added a Senate Democratic staffer, "It has been made clear that, through the midterms, the floor will be tied up with judicial nominees."

After the midterms, whether the Democrats hold the Senate or not, it will be a new, 118th Congress and that means all the ambassadorial nominations now floundering in senatorial purgatory will have to be resubmitted, and the process will begin again, from scratch.

Both the White House and State, in their official statements to me, emphasized the number of ambassadors they were able to confirm, despite the unprecedented obstruction they're facing in the Senate. Things are actually going pretty well, they say, all things considered. But privately, the tone is very different. People worry about recruiting and retention. Who in their right mind would want to go through a process like this? Others worry about the irreparable harm this is doing to our relationships with allies and adversaries abroad, especially after the calamity that was the Trump presidency.

"It's baffling to our foreign interlocutors because they don't have these confirmation processes, and our inability to field ambassadors when there are so many crises around the world is unbelievable to them," one former State Department official told me. "It's also having a huge impact at State on morale and retention. I think because there's so much uncertainty over how long it takes to get confirmed, the currency of an ambassadorship is being devalued. You have people

waiting for a year or more to get confirmed. People have quit jobs for these posts. Others are waiting inside State, stuck in limbo forever. I heard of someone who considered retiring while waiting to be confirmed."

Eric Rubin, himself a former ambassador to Bulgaria and deputy chief of mission in Russia, is worried about what message this is sending to the two countries most eager to weaken and replace America on the world stage: Russia and China. "The U.S. no longer has the largest diplomatic service, China does," Rubin told me. "The U.S. no longer has the most embassies and consulates abroad, China does. We have to stop tying one hand behind our backs in our efforts to represent our country and advance its security and prosperity."

Or, in the words of the diplomatic insider, "It's malpractice."

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Ambassador Rubin put it very starkly. He said:

The U.S. no longer has the largest diplomatic service. China does.

He concluded by saying:

We have to stop tying one hand behind our backs in our efforts to represent our country and advance its security and prosperity.

It's malpractice.

It is malpractice.

The fact that too many people in this Chamber are dragging their feet on allowing Ambassadors to be confirmed, on allowing diplomats with the Department of State to be confirmed, on allowing other high level people throughout government to be confirmed because, only, of their opposition to the Biden administration is just untenable, and it is against our national security.

So I think it is time now for the Senate to do its job to confirm Dr. Gupta. So let's move forward. Let's get our foreign policy with respect to gender throughout the world back on track.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mr. HAGERTY. Madam President, I have great respect for my colleague from New Hampshire. I worked very hard on the WGDP initiative that was put in place by the previous administration. It has the potential to do so much good.

I am very concerned about elements of that being dismantled right now, and I would like to remind my colleagues on the other side of the aisle that this is a matter of priorities.

Again, I will reiterate that I was put through 30 hours of cloture. The rules have been improved since then to reduce that amount of time. I think it would be a total of 4 hours in this case, yet the priorities set by the leadership of the other side indicate that they don't care as much about these positions because they won't even schedule it.

It is certainly within the Senate majority leader's power to do that. Rather, the Senate majority leader would rather prioritize seating the Postal Board of Governors than putting Ambassadors into place.

So I have difficulty with this argument, and, with all due respect, my objection stands.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. SULLIVAN. Madam President, my colleague from Tennessee was just talking about priorities of this administration and this Senate, and I want to continue on that area of focus, relating to what many of us believe is probably the most important priority we have in the U.S. Senate, and that is defending our Nation.

Budgets are a reflection of an administration's values and an administration's priorities. And as I mentioned, many of us—and I believe on both sides of the aisle—see that the No. 1 priority we should have in the U.S. Senate is making sure we are a strong nation, to defend this great country of ours and to make sure we have the most lethal, well-trained military anywhere in the world, and that we take care of our troops and their families.

But this is not what this administration—the Biden administration—believes at all. In fact, President Biden's budgets clearly not only do not prioritize our military; they put them consistently last. And that is not a one-time thing. This is a pattern with this administration.

Here was the President's proposed budget last year. Take a look at it. We all know it was trillions and trillions. Department of Commerce, 28 percent increase. EPA, 21 percent. Interior, 16 percent—on and on. There are double-digit increases everywhere except—except—in the two Agencies that actually protect the Nation: the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security.

Last year, the Biden budget put forward a budget that, if it was adjusted for inflation, was almost a 3-percent cut to the Department of Defense.

Priorities matter. This administration has not prioritized our military at all.

Guess who was really pleased by that budget, by the way? The dictator in Beijing and the dictator in Moscow. No doubt when they saw that, they loved it.

Thankfully, the Armed Services Committee, on which I sit, said: Do you know what, Mr. President? With all due respect, this is nuts. We are not going to stand for this.

We put forward in the National Defense Authorization Act last year a 3-percent real increase to the Department of Defense budget. It was very bipartisan in the committee, a complete rebuke to the President of the United States, saying: We don't believe in cuts. We are going to increase. The appropriators, thankfully, did the same.

So that was the Biden administration's prioritization of our military last year.

Now, what happened between last year and this year, when the most recent budget came out? Well, I think a lot of us know, but I am going to talk a little bit about it.

Russia invaded Ukraine, and at an April Armed Services hearing, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

General Milley, said that the invasion was "the greatest threat to the peace and security of Europe and perhaps the world in any of my time of 42 years in uniform."

So this is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff saying we are likely seeing one of the most dangerous periods anywhere in the world in terms of national security in the last four decades.

That was testimony from the President's own Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

That is Russia. And, of course, their ally China is also taking incredibly aggressive actions all around the world. They are beginning to outcompete our country on many fronts—critical minerals, energy, technology.

Certainly, Xi Jinping, the dictator of Beijing, has increased China's aggression all around the world—in India, threatening to invade Taiwan, economic aggression toward Australia, snuffing out liberty in Hong Kong.

What else has China done? It is dramatically increasing its defense spending—more than 7 percent this year—increasing a navy that is almost becoming larger than ours.

This is how General Milley, again, put it in a hearing last April:

We are now facing two global powers, China and Russia, each with significant military capabilities, both of whom intend to fundamentally change the current rules-based global order. We are entering a world that is becoming more unstable and the potential for significant international conflict between great powers is increasing, not decreasing.

So that is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, again.

Now, what do you think the President did, seeing we had this incredibly dangerous period internationally, with his next budget? Last year, as I mentioned, he cut the Pentagon defense budget by almost 3 percent and dead last with Homeland Security in terms of Agencies.

So did he listen to his Chairman? Does he really think it is that dangerous? Let's see.

This is this year's defense budget and other priorities from this administration's multitrillion dollar budget, and, once again, you see the EPA coming in at a 24-percent increase. Commerce, HHS, and Labor are all double-digit—Interior, DOJ.

What about the Department of Defense? It is a 4-percent increase with almost 9-percent inflation. We are talking close to a 5-percent real cut to the Department of Defense. This is outrageous.

Last year, the President put forward almost a 4-percent cut to defense spending. In the interim period, we had one of the most dangerous wars that has happened—certainly in Europe and maybe in the world—in a generation. The President's own Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff come before the Senate Armed Services Committee and say it is an incredibly dangerous time—a period, maybe, in almost 50 years in