

devastating force if Putin does, indeed, plow ahead.

The United States and our partners should waste no time in helping Ukraine prepare for war—weapons, materiel, advice, logistics, and intelligence. We should be building the infrastructure to help Ukraine sustain their resistance to Russian aggression if and when it comes.

I welcome the President's deployment of additional forces to the territory of NATO allies situated along our alliance's eastern flank. I recommended he take such action months ago. And I am particularly grateful to the Kentuckians of the 101st Airborne Division who are leaving Fort Campbell this week to join NATO reinforcements in Eastern Europe.

As our diplomats work to halt the train of Russian aggression, it is the brave men and women of the U.S. military who give their words added weight.

I am hopeful that President Biden will rise to the occasion. As a bipartisan group of colleagues and I made clear in a joint statement yesterday, the President would have overwhelming, bipartisan support to use his existing Executive authorities for tough sanctions against Russia in the event of conflict.

We should acknowledge Putin's use of energy as a weapon. If the President is serious about providing relief for Americans at the pump or blunting Putin's manipulation of energy markets, he will stop his administration's anti-energy policies that make it harder for our own producers to explore, to produce, and to export energy to vulnerable allies.

While our eastern flank allies have consistently taken a clear-eyed approach to their own defense, it is time for America to invest more meaningfully in our own military capabilities and demand that our allies in Western Europe actually follow suit.

Whether the administration is serious about competition with Russia and China will be clear when it submits its fiscal 2023 budget request. Our allies and adversaries will all be watching.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. President, now on a different matter, while the world's eyes are fixed on the present foreign policy crisis, troubling facts are continuing to surface surrounding the administration's previous self-inflicted crisis—the botched retreat from Afghanistan.

Last week, journalists published the findings of a 2,000-page autopsy that Army officials compiled following the chaotic withdrawal from Kabul. The report hammers home a damning fact we have actually already known for months: The Biden administration received clear advance warnings from commanders on the ground that should have been heeded but went ignored. As I warned at the time, we have confirmation this disaster was foreseeable—foreseen, actually—and avoidable.

The Army's conclusions build upon the report from the Special Inspector General which was declassified last month.

While President Biden and his political advisers still cling to the notion that they got mistaken advice and were caught off-guard, both these reports suggest that nonpartisan experts knew and predicted the Afghan military would likely collapse and spent months trying in vain to get the administration to pay attention.

Top commanders reported that trying to get State Department officials to engage in advance evacuation plans was like “pulling teeth”; that the National Security Council was “not seriously planning for an evacuation”; that among peers in uniform, “everyone clearly saw some of the advantage of holding Bagram.”

As the top U.S. commander on the ground during the evacuation put it, policymakers had not “paid attention to the indicators of what was happening on the ground.”

This staggering report from our own U.S. Army should have chastened the Biden administration. It should be an occasion for apology, reflection, and accountability. But last week, President Biden instead tried to simply wave away our own Army's conclusions without evidence.

He was asked, “Are you rejecting the conclusions or the accounts in this [Army] report?”

The President replied, “Yes, I am.”

“So, they're not true?”

“I'm rejecting them,” the President said.

No evidence; just hand-waving denial. Frankly, it was a bizarre performance.

Our retreat from Afghanistan seriously damaged America's credibility. It made confronting terrorist threats that much harder from over the horizon, and it invited more testing like what we are now enduring in Eastern Europe.

President Biden and his team were warned of all these dangers well in advance by our own military, but our Commander in Chief seems to have flat-out ignored our commanders. This has been an unbelievably costly lesson that the Biden administration should never have had to learn even once. Let us all hope they don't need to learn it twice.

LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS

Mr. President, now on one final matter, parents and kids need a swift end to pandemic disruptions that ignore the incredibly low risk to children.

I am proudly joining Senator THUNE and many of our Republican colleagues on a resolution that would overturn the absurd preschool mask mandates which the Biden administration has tied to Head Start funding.

More than 1,200 doctors and health professionals have signed a public statement about “the Urgency of Normal”—“the Urgency of Normal”—the medical and moral urgency of returning normalcy back to children as fast

as possible. Republicans at the local, State, and Federal level are standing with the parents. We are going to keep fighting against these disruptions to family life caused by rules and mandates that are not at all based in science. Two years of needless school closures and unscientific, forced child-masking are 2 years too many.

But, unfortunately, pandemic policies are not the only reason that recent years have been one giant advertisement for school choice and parents' rights. We have also seen far-left bureaucrats trying desperately to inject radical theories and fringe ideas into teacher trainings and K-12 classrooms.

Everybody has heard draw-dropping anecdotes from school districts all across our country. Last year, the Biden administration tried to divert money for mainstream civics education into woke propaganda like the debunked 1619 Project. They only backed down when Senate Republicans called out Secretary Cardona directly. Meanwhile, the far-left national teachers union adopted an official resolution and approved extra money for their fight to make “structural racism” and “critical race theory” into central tenets in kids' schooling.

This nonsense is absolutely pervasive—pervasive.

Just a few weeks ago, North Carolina parents had to call out their statewide Office of Early Learning for funding training materials that talked about “deconstruct[ing] whiteness”—“deconstruct[ing] whiteness.” These materials were for preschool teachers.

In San Francisco, the school board spent 2021 focused on renaming schools instead of reopening schools. They decided “George Washington” and “Abraham Lincoln” were insufficiently woke namesakes, and they tried to change a prestigious high school's merit-based standards into a non-merit-based lottery in the name of equity.

Not surprisingly, parents are watching this nonsense and demanding change. For example, just yesterday, a multiethnic multilingual recall campaign to unseat three of those San Francisco school board members won an overwhelming victory with the voters.

American parents are speaking out, but instead of listening to them, the political left is lashing out.

President Biden's Education Secretary solicited an outside group to send a letter to President Biden's Attorney General that referred to concerned parents as potential domestic terrorists.

One part of the Biden administration set up another part of the Biden administration with a pretext to investigate and harass concerned parents.

One far-left advocate recently complained to NPR that “school transparency is essentially this big brother-type regime.” What a joke.

The nationwide teachers union boss, Randi Weingarten, personally tweeted out a claim that “racists . . . are showing up in droves to school board meetings.”

Even the liberal ACLU, which used to care about individual rights and transparency, is prioritizing woke bureaucrats ahead of middle-class parents. Here was the ACLU's statement:

Curriculum transparency bills are just thinly veiled attempts at chilling teachers and students from learning and talking about race and gender in schools.

So let's think about that for a minute. The far left is admitting in public that if the public gets to look at the racial and gender theories that they want to teach little kids, then those lesson plans will become untenable.

I am going to say that again. The far left is admitting in public that if the public gets a look at the racial and gender theories that they want to teach little kids, then these lesson plans will become untenable.

That is what they are actually saying. If parents gain transparency into the crazy stuff we are teaching, we might have to stop teaching it.

In other words, their reaction proves the point. The fact that woke bureaucrats are this terrified by transparency proves exactly—exactly—why parents deserve it.

Bear in mind, these same people are passionate supporters of a sweeping toddler takeover that would give Federal bureaucrats huge new powers to shape early childhood across America and discriminate against religious daycares.

The choice before American families is actually pretty stark. On the one hand, an alliance between Big Labor, woke bureaucrats, and many elected Democrats apparently wants indefinitely masked children being taught radical nonsense while parents are pushed to the sidelines. But Republicans at the local, State, and national levels are standing up for science, for common sense, and for the children's best interests. The party of parents has your back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, over the last 12 months, the economy has rebounded at levels that we have not seen in decades—a 5.7-percent GDP growth rate and 6.6 million new jobs. This is the fastest our economy has grown since, perhaps, 1984, and the new jobs we added to the economy were the most ever for a President's first year.

After former President Trump botched our national response to COVID, America is now on the right track under President Biden, but we

face serious challenges that demand action from Congress. The cost of living has come up for families across the country and around the world. The destruction unleashed by COVID has decimated supply chains, strained the labor supply, and the effects of a global pandemic that began 2 years ago still reverberate today. These challenges demand action, and Democrats remain laser-focused on lowering costs for American families.

Yesterday, our caucus met for our weekly lunch, where we held a spirited, enthusiastic discussion about ideas from our Members of how we can lower costs and take action to do so. We talked about how we can continue working to lower childcare costs, prescription drug costs, the costs of semiconductors, which is a huge driver of price increases across a wide variety of products, and things as basic and vital as the cost of food and meat.

Lowering costs will continue to be a caucuswide effort. We are not going to agree on everything, but we are all on the same page in that we need to tackle the issue head on.

That is the difference between Democrats and Republicans. Rising costs, of course, impact all of us, whether we come from blue or red States, but Democrats are the ones laser-focused on showing where we stand and in offering solutions that aim squarely at the problem. Republicans seem to have no solutions, just rhetoric. The other side, sadly, seems, oftentimes, motivated by something else. Rather than working with us in a bipartisan spirit, our Republican colleagues seem more comfortable giving speeches that go on and on about rising costs without offering any solutions. Complaining about the problem doesn't make inflation better—proposing solutions does—and that is precisely what Democrats will continue focusing on.

Over the next month and beyond, Members from our side will continue offering a number of solutions—solutions—that will lower costs and leave more money in people's pockets. We need to help working families build wealth after the pandemic. We need to lower the costs of medications like insulin, which can still reach \$600 a month. We need to relieve our strained supply chains and increase domestic manufacturing on things like chips—and on that front, I am hopeful that we can take bipartisan action soon.

Our Republican colleagues, we hope, will join us in these efforts. Our Members would welcome it.

We have come a long way from the start of COVID, but we still have more to do. Democrats' goals are to make sure that the job creation and wage increases of last year carry into this year. We are going to keep working on that this spring, and I hope to see our colleagues from the other side work with us to improve the lives of the American people. If we can keep wages growing and get costs down, the average American will have more money in his or her pocket to live a better life.

FURTHER ADDITIONAL EXTENDING GOVERNMENT FUNDING ACT

Mr. President, on the CR, soon our Republican colleagues must come to an agreement with Democrats for passing a continuing resolution to keep the government open until March 11. This extension is necessary in order to give appropriators more time to arrive at an omnibus.

On the one hand, bipartisan negotiations on a yearlong spending bill continue to go well—a credit to everyone working on this issue from both sides of the aisle. I thank Chairman LEAHY, Ranking Member SHELBY, and my House colleagues.

On the other hand, right now, the thing we must do—the responsible thing to do—is to pass the CR before the deadline on Friday. Democrats are united in approving it just as it was approved with great bipartisan support in the House.

Nobody here wants a Republican government shutdown. I dare say Republicans prefer not to have a Republican shutdown, but for that to happen, Republicans must keep working with us on an agreement to move quickly on a CR. Democrats are working in good faith to reach a time agreement soon with our Republican colleagues. There is every reason in the world to arrive at an agreement quickly, so I urge my colleagues on the other side to keep working with us to get there.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, later today, the Senate is scheduled to advance and confirm a pair of critical Department of Defense nominees.

One of them is Celeste Wallander, nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs. A veteran of the National Security Council, Ms. Wallander is one of our country's top Russian experts and a deeply experienced foreign policy adviser.

As tensions persist in Eastern Europe, Ms. Wallander's expertise is urgently needed, and her nomination must be approved as soon as possible. Frankly, it should have happened weeks ago, the moment she was reported out of committee with support from both sides, but Ms. Wallander has remained on hold because one Member of this body—just one Republican—has objected to her swift passage.

Intentionally delaying the confirmation of a qualified expert on Russian affairs at a time like this is supremely reckless and is making the American people less safe. For a Member of the Senate to insist on this hold is a clear risk to our national security, and it only serves to undermine our defense efforts. It is unacceptable and the definition of "cynical."

Let me say it again.

To intentionally delay the confirmation of a critical Department of Defense nominee and a Russian expert at a time when tensions persist in Ukraine and Eastern Europe is supremely reckless and is making the American people less safe.