

Now, for months, Speaker MCCARTHY has insisted on cuts in exchange for avoiding a default. We all know the best way to avoid default is with no brinkmanship, no hostage-taking. Do it clean. President Trump did it twice with Democrats and Republicans working together, and President Biden did it once with Democrats and Republicans working together. That is the way to do this.

MCCARTHY is insisting on cuts, but, to boot, he doesn't say what those cuts are. As I have said previously, there is a time and place to discuss cuts, but that is not part of this conversation. It belongs in the discussion about the budget, not as a precondition for avoiding default.

Again, let me repeat that so they might hear it on the other side, in the House Chamber: The discussion about cuts belongs in the discussion about budget, not as a precondition for avoiding default.

The solution here is straightforward. Republicans should work with Democrats in good faith to avoid default altogether just as we did with Donald Trump: no blackmail, no brinkmanship, no default.

Speaker MCCARTHY, show us your plan.

President Biden and I are happy to meet with Speaker MCCARTHY when he has something to talk about—a plan—as most Democratic leaders are, but we need to see his plan first so we can start from there and work to avoid a catastrophic default altogether. If we go to meetings without Speaker MCCARTHY having a plan, what are we going to do—talk about the furniture? the weather?

Finally, Speaker MCCARTHY, today, quoted a great Yankee, the great Babe Ruth, saying:

You just can't beat the person who never gives up.

Well, first, Speaker MCCARTHY, don't quote a Yankee to me in New York City. Second, the Speaker is right; he has never given up. However, that is only because he has never started: no plan, no progress, no persistence.

So, to make sense of today's speech, I think it was another great Yankee, the great No. 8, Yogi Berra, who hit the nail on the head. "It's *deja vu* all over again," Yogi said. It applies exactly to Speaker MCCARTHY's speech today—no plan, no progress, nothing.

Speaker MCCARTHY, show us a plan. Work to deliver for the American people.

To sum it all up, Speaker MCCARTHY plays a risky and dangerous game when insisting on imposing severe cuts which would hurt the American people and threaten our economy before we avoid default. In addition, to boot, he can't even reveal what those cuts are. This is a sad truth, but it is the truth. If Speaker MCCARTHY doesn't change his course, he could well take this country over the cliff to default for the first time.

HOUSE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

Mr. President, on Republican extremism, at the start of the year, I warned that Republicans in Congress faced a critical choice: Abandon MAGA extremism for the good of the country or double down on the road to radicalism. Four months later, too many Republicans have made the choice clear. Instead of coming to the middle, they have sprinted to the extremes. Instead of abandoning MAGA, too many Republicans have doubled down; especially look at the last few weeks. Look no further than what happened last week in Florida, where the Republican Governor signed one of the most extreme anti-choice bills in the entire country, a near total ban on abortion after 6 weeks.

Let's not kid ourselves: A 6-week ban is practically a total ban. Many women don't even know they are pregnant by 6 weeks. Most Floridians fiercely oppose such a draconian provision, one that will endanger not only millions of women in Florida but tens of millions of women across the entire south who, tragically, have fewer and fewer options for accessing reproductive care.

And lest anyone think Republicans oppose abortion because of States' rights—oh, no. The decision by a Federal judge in Texas issuing a nationwide suspension of mifepristone should make it clear what this is about: a national ban on abortion. That is where the Republicans seem to be.

Republicans seem to be caught—these 2 weeks made it clear—in a self-destructive dynamic: The more that Americans reject their extreme views at the ballot box, the more these MAGA Republicans seem to double down.

We have seen this played out on choice, but we are seeing it play out on gun safety. Let me be clear: Most Americans support some commonsense gun safety. Parents are tired of worrying about whether their kids are safe at school. But when tragedy struck at a school in Nashville, TN, Republicans reacted not by voting new gun safety laws but, instead, by expelling two representatives of color who dared commit the sin of speaking out against the inaction. That is the anthesis of democracy. That is the road to outright autocracy.

Even today, Republican extremism was on full display in New York City. Today, the Republican House Judiciary chairman held what he claimed was a field hearing about public safety. But to date, Chairman JORDAN and his colleagues have refused to denounce President Trump's call to defund the FBI and the DOJ.

Defunding the FBI is truly unhinged, and every single Member of the House and Senate—Democrat and Republican alike—should unequivocally condemn former President Trump for pushing this idea. Very soon, the Members of this Chamber will have a chance to go on record and denounce the former President's call to cut funding to our

Federal law enforcement. I hope everyone in the Chamber does the right thing.

The FBI—many of them risk their lives to protect us from drugs, from guns, from terrorism. Defund it just because President Trump, in his self-serving moment, said so? Where are our Republican friends, or are they just moving so far to the right they can't even reject something as clear as this?

As I said moments ago, Republicans are caught in a self-destructive dynamic: The more that Americans reject their extreme views at the ballot box, the more they seem to double down. If they continue down this road, not only will our country suffer, but the GOP themselves will suffer as Americans keep rejecting them at the ballot box. If they continue down this road, our country will suffer and so will the GOP as Americans keep rejecting them at the ballot box.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. President, finally, on upcoming Senate business, today, the Senate gavels back in for the start of a busy week, a very busy work period.

There is so much we must do on lowering costs and improving lives of American families, strengthening healthcare, lowering prescription drug costs, preserving America's competitiveness, and protecting America's fundamental rights. We will get to work on these issues, particularly starting off with the fire bill, which will come before us this week.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is welcomed back.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is good to be back.

I want to thank all of my colleagues for their warm wishes shared over the past few weeks. Suffice it to say, this wasn't the first time that being hard-headed has served me very well.

We are truly lucky and blessed to get to serve in this remarkable institution, represent our home States, and serve our country. Needless to say, I am very happy to be back.

There is important business for Congress to tackle. We should be working to undo this administration's mistakes. We need to secure the border, reduce crime, fight inflation, and invest in America's strength and our security.

On an even more basic level, President Biden and his administration are literally "on the clock" to negotiate a debt ceiling solution with Speaker MCCARTHY and the Republican majority over in the House. The President's economic advisers say the deadline for a solution is not far off, but his political advisers apparently think the White House's position should be—listen to this—no talks and no reforms.

This extreme position is not even holding up in their own party. Even Washington Democrats are breaking

ranks from the administration's position of no talks and no reforms.

One of our Senate Democratic colleagues wrote an entire Washington Post op-ed calling on the President to sit down with Congress and reform spending. Reports indicate that a whole group of House Democrats are already talking about negotiations and about compromise.

Just a few years ago, the Democratic leader, Leader SCHUMER, said this about the debt ceiling:

[It] gives another ample opportunity for bipartisanship, not for one party jamming its choices down the throats of the other.

So President Biden does not get to stick his fingers in his ears and refuse to listen, talk, or negotiate, and the American people know that. The White House needs to stop wasting time and start negotiating with the Speaker of the House.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

MITCH MCCONNELL AND JOHN FETTERMAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I welcome back my self-described, hard-headed Republican leader in the Senate.

It is good to see you, MITCH. I'm glad you are back.

I want to welcome Senator MCCONNELL as well as Senator FETTERMAN, who will be here today as well.

I spoke to him by Zoom several weeks ago, and I was really heartened by his message. He had the courage to step up and ask for help when he faced depression, to seek professional and medical advice, and I could tell by his responses and the tone of his voice that that decision had already made a difference in his life for the better.

I told him at the time I was so happy to speak to him personally, that what he had done publicly to address the issue of his own personal depression and the overall issue of mental health would save lives across America. I believe people will be inspired to follow his example and seek help.

We are, fortunately, living in a time and an age and a generation where the attitude toward mental health is much different than it was many years ago.

There was a time when mental illness was considered not just an illness but a curse, and people didn't speak about it. I know I had similar examples in my own family of people who were just speaking in whispers about the issues that related to my relatives.

That is changing for the better. Our honesty and openness in dealing with mental health makes us a better nation, and people will have better lives as a result of it.

I thank my colleague Senator FETTERMAN for stepping up and making the right decision in his life, and I am looking forward to his return.

VLADIMIR KARA-MURZA

On another topic, Mr. President, today, a Russian puppet court sentenced opposition leader Vladimir Kara-Murza to 25 years in prison. For

what? What did he do to merit a 25-year sentence in Russia? He had the nerve to criticize Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

This is his photograph, incidentally. He visited my office several times before he made the incredible decision to go back to Russia and to confront the Putin administration. Now he is facing a 25-year sentence.

It comes on the heels of reports that Russian authorities may be trying to slowly poison another opposition leader, Alexey Navalny, after a failed attempt on his life in 2020.

Previously, Vladimir Putin tried twice to poison Mr. Kara-Murza as well. This kind of extrajudicial, extralegal process has become all too common in Russia.

Apparently, Putin's fear of Russian patriots like Navalny and Kara-Murza, who have only advocated for an open and democratic Russia that is at peace with its neighbors, knows no ends.

Vladimir Kara-Murza, Alexey Navalny, and so many other Russians are courageously pursuing a better future for their country. They deserve our support and solidarity.

MIFEPRISTONE

Mr. President, this week, the fate of women's healthcare rests with the Supreme Court of the United States. In the coming days, the Justices are expected to decide whether one activist judge in Texas can singlehandedly disregard decades of medical and professional consensus, whether he can create chaos for doctors and women seeking abortion and cut off access to reproductive healthcare nationwide.

Remember when Justice Alito announced that the Dobbs decision would just give each State the authority to regulate abortion? It sounded so simple: 50 different standards for abortion, but then each State can make the decision.

Well, it has been less than a year since the Court's rightwing majority issued that decision overruling *Roe v. Wade*. Here we are, faced with the very real possibility that mifepristone—a pill, a drug, a medicine the Food and Drug Administration approved more than 20 years ago—could be banned or severely restricted all across the Nation—so much for each State's experiment on the issue. This decision would affect the medication nationwide, even in States where abortion has been judged legal.

So how did we reach this point? It starts with one Federal judge in Texas, Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, and his original attempt to upend our Nation's drug approval process and ban mifepristone. You see, this drug has been on the market for over 20 years, approved by the Food and Drug Administration.

This story really reveals the fallacy at the heart of the Dobbs decision. Justice Alito and the rightwing majority claimed that they were just going to settle the controversy over abortion by returning the issue to each State, but,

in truth, they just replaced controversy with chaos. The Dobbs ruling didn't resolve anything. It merely paved the way for activist judges like Judge Kacsmaryk to impose their radical agenda on everyone else, even in States which had voted to protect the right to abortion.

Earlier this month, that is what happened. Judge Kacsmaryk, in Amarillo, TX, defied decades of scientific evidence to revoke the FDA's approval of the medical abortion drug mifepristone. The medication is used in more than half the abortions in America. It is safe, it is extremely effective, and studies show that it is safer than Tylenol and presents fewer risks than routine medical procedures like colonoscopy. In the past 20 years, millions of American women have used this drug to terminate an early pregnancy or to help manage a miscarriage with minimal complications. So this attempt to ban this medication isn't grounded in science, and it certainly isn't grounded in any concern about the safety of women.

You see, Judge Kacsmaryk is a long-standing, outspoken critic of abortion. Just this weekend, the Washington Post revealed that this very same judge in Amarillo, TX, failed to disclose to the Senate Judiciary Committee an article that he had cowritten criticizing abortion rights when he was nominated to the Federal bench.

So why exactly did this judge, a known anti-choice radical, end up deciding this case with implications in the entire United States of America? Well, it wasn't a coincidence, believe me. On the contrary, it was a classic case of judge shopping. That is when plaintiffs game the legal system to bring their case before a favorable judge.

In this case, the plaintiffs, a group of rightwing MAGA activists, filed a lawsuit challenging the FDA's approval of mifepristone in the Amarillo division of the Northern District of Texas. Under the district court's rules, all cases filed in the Amarillo division are assigned to one judge. You can guess his name: Judge Kacsmaryk. So these rightwing activists knew, if they filed an antiabortion lawsuit in Amarillo, their case would be decided by a friendly judge who shares their views and his ruling would have an impact not just on Amarillo and Texas but the entire United States of America.

Well, the plaintiffs got exactly what they wanted. Judge Kacsmaryk delivered. The scheme worked. He delivered the biggest blow to reproductive rights since last year's Dobbs decision—so much for each State making a decision.

His decision didn't return this issue to the States. It replaced the will of the people in the States with this judge's point of view. By attempting to ban mifepristone nationwide, the judge tried to impose new national restrictions on abortion that have no basis in science and are extremely dangerous.

Now, there have been a number of developments in this case over the past