

safe, the “Default on America Act” will wipe out nearly 30,000 law enforcement positions while gutting critical resources to secure the border. Again, Donald Trump told House Republicans to defund law enforcement, and the “Default on America Act,” on cue, does just that.

Put plainly, the House Republicans are hell-bent on default one way or another—either a default on the debt or a default on everything else: on our future, our children, our promise to care for our kids and veterans and law enforcement and first responders. No matter what happens, Republicans are promising real pain for American families.

And what happened just a few hours ago in the wee hours of the morning? Plainly, Speaker MCCARTHY capitulated even further to the hard right. Again, if anything, this revised bill is even more extreme, more radical—a more radical version of the “Default on America Act.” It brings us no closer to avoiding a default on the national debt.

Let me be clear. Democrats cannot and will not allow the Republicans’s “DOA Act” to ever become law. It is DOA, plain and simple. And if Republicans refuse to level with the public about the terrible things their “Default on America Act” will do to them, Democrats will do the work ourselves. We will let America know how bad this is because Republicans are intent on hiding it. They know how unpopular it would be.

In the meantime, Speaker MCCARTHY needs to recognize that all the energy he is putting into passing the “Default on America Act” will be wasted effort. The Speaker should drop the brinksmanship, drop the hostage-taking, come to the table with Democrats, and pass a clean bill to avoid default. Given where the Republican proposal is, that is the only way to go. Time is running out.

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Mr. President, on the ERA, tomorrow, the Senate will have a chance to take the next major step on an effort a century in the making: ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment under the Constitution.

The story of American democracy has been an uneven but inexorable march toward greater equality for all people. America’s foundation contains a simple premise: No matter who you are, where you come from, you too deserve equal treatment under the law.

The Senate will have a chance tomorrow to bring our country one step closer toward greater equity by voting on a bipartisan resolution regarding the Equal Rights Amendment. The measure is simple. It will recognize that 38 States have now legitimately ratified the Equal Rights Amendment, meeting the threshold required under the Constitution. It would remove an arbitrary deadline set decades ago that invalidated the ratification that occurred in a few States. The States did the work,

just not in the required time that was imposed on them a very long time ago. I believe the Senate should now remove that obstacle.

And we must act now because the Equal Rights Amendment has never been more necessary than today. To the horror of hundreds of millions of people, women in America have fewer rights today than they did even a year ago. The protections of *Roe v. Wade* are gone thanks to the MAGA majority on the Supreme Court. Over a dozen States have near-total abortion bans, and tens of millions of people have to travel hundreds of miles just to access reproductive care. That is sickening.

We cannot claim that America is a nation of equal justice when half of its citizenry languishes on with fewer rights, less dignity, and limited recourse under the Constitution. That is why the Senate must vote in favor of advancing this ERA resolution tomorrow, so we can bring our Nation one step closer to greater justice, greater equality, and equal rights for all people, regardless of gender.

Thank you to Senators CARDIN and MURKOWSKI for championing this resolution. I look forward to voting in its favor tomorrow.

ELIZABETH DOLE VETERANS PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT ACT

Mr. President, finally, the Senate will take the first procedural vote on legislation to care for our Nation’s veterans, spearheaded by my good friend Senator TESTER, head of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee.

The Elizabeth Dole Veterans Program Improvement Act of 2023 is the union of a number of important and impactful bills that will strengthen the VA, improve its caregiver program, expand home- and community-based services for vets, and ultimately bestow greater dignity on those who defended our Nation.

The bipartisan veterans bill is precisely the sort of legislation the Senate should be working on to build on our success on the PACT Act last year. This is bipartisan, far-reaching, and will make an enormous difference in the lives of our veterans across the country.

I want to thank Senator TESTER, Senator MORAN, and Members from both sides of the aisle for working on this important veterans package.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

ISSUES FACING AMERICA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in the last several years, Democrats have given many dramatic speeches about our country’s norms and institutions, about the rule of law and the health of democracy. But the sad irony has been this: The same political left that shouted so loudly about norms, institutions, and the rule of law has kept trying to steamroll these principles themselves.

Look at recent events at the State capitol buildings in Tennessee and Montana—angry liberal activists in shoving matches with law enforcement, shouting down proceedings. I myself am on the record as a firm critic of rioters and disrupting legislatures, across the board, no matter who is doing it. Why can’t the left be as consistent?

And look at their side’s growing hostility to the very independence of our judicial branch. A few weeks ago, when one Federal judge issued a ruling with policy outcomes that Democrats didn’t like, they started suggesting that politicians should just openly disobey—just openly disobey—the judge’s rulings.

Those suggestions are toxic and, frankly, anti-American. It was wrong when President Andrew Jackson tried to ignore the Court way back in the 1830s, it was dead wrong when Governor Faubus defied the Court on civil rights in the 1950s, and it is wrong also when today’s Democratic Party brings all of that back.

The attacks on the judiciary don’t stop there. In 2020, our colleague the Democratic leader stood on the very steps of the Supreme Court and threatened Justices by name—by name—with a “whirlwind” of retaliation if they failed to rule the way he wanted.

Then, after top Democrats encouraged mob outrage over a leaked draft opinion, President Biden’s Attorney General failed to enforce clear Federal law and put a stop—a stop—to illegal protests that sought to intimidate the Justices at their private family homes.

Recently, a number of Senate Democrats have gone so far as to propose defunding security needs for the Justices and their families if Chief Justice Roberts doesn’t reorganize internal matters the way Democrats would prefer. So after fanning the flames of violence against an equal branch of government, Democrats now want to defund the Justices’ ability to protect themselves and their families if certain Senators don’t get their way.

They are trying to turn impartial judges into partisan hostages. This is really beyond irresponsible.

And then, of course, there are the desperate and never-ending attempts to smear and defame Justices appointed by Republican Presidents, going back years and decades. Over the last few weeks, two Justices have been particularly subjected to a carousel of character assassination. I am sure it will be another Justice’s turn again before too long. This is simply how the far left treats the rule of law.

Let me just repeat that I have total confidence in Justice Gorsuch, Justice Thomas, and all seven of their distinguished colleagues, no matter who appointed them—no matter who appointed them. Just yesterday, all nine Justices explained in a statement their joint approach to maintaining their high ethical standards. Unlike the activists and elected Democrats trying to

tear them down, the Justices have proven their sobriety and judicial temperament over their long and distinguished careers.

VEHICLE EMISSIONS

Mr. President, now on another matter, today, the senior Senator from Nebraska will advance a resolution to push back on the Biden administration's war against American energy and American industry.

Senator FISCHER's resolution responds to the Biden administration's new plan to hike already stringent vehicle emission standards even higher. This latest rule on nitrogen oxide emissions takes direct aim at the sort of trucks and heavy equipment that literally drive our entire economy.

Back in 2021, climate activists got the President to invoke "environmental justice" in an Executive order rolling out its so-called Clean Trucks Plan. The same bureaucrats who can't control inflation or secure the border want to even more closely micro-manage the heavy vehicles allowed on our roads. Never mind that the nitrogen oxide emissions of new trucks on the market are already—listen to this—already 98 to 99 percent lower than they were as recently as the late 1990s.

By the EPA's own estimates, the new technology required to meet the latest arbitrary benchmarks could jack up truck prices by as much as \$8,304 each—each.

Listen to what the truckers themselves have to say:

If small business owners can't afford the new, compliant trucks, they're going to stay with older, less-efficient trucks, or leave the industry entirely.

Leave the industry entirely? Higher priced trucks, fewer drivers, higher costs for consumer goods—that is an outcome working families and supply chains simply can't stomach.

So I want to express my gratitude to Senator FISCHER for bringing this resolution forward. I would urge each of our colleagues to support it.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. 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.

INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, one of President Biden's favorite things to talk about is giving families "a little bit of breathing room." It is a phrase he uses frequently, just as he also frequently talks about growing the economy "from the middle out and the bottom up, not from the top down."

He used both phrases in a speech just last week. And, frankly, it is somewhat staggering to me that he continues to talk like this, because the Biden economy is the story of taking away Ameri-

cans' breathing room. It is a story of declining purchasing power for lower and middle-income families, of wages that don't keep pace with increased costs, of stretched budgets and difficult spending decisions. President Biden has presided over a historic inflation crisis that has left American families struggling just to keep up. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture in February 2023, a cost-effective nutritious meal plan for a family of four cost \$979.40 per month.

Two years earlier, that same family would have had to spend \$674.80. That is a 45-percent increase—a 45-percent increase. The Biden economy is costing that family of four an additional \$304 a month for groceries, or \$3,655 per year more. And, again, that is just on groceries.

I don't need to tell anyone that prices have risen across the board, 15.4 percent on average since President Biden took office, and American families are feeling the pinch. A recent CNBC survey found that 70 percent of Americans are feeling financially stressed—70 percent—and that the majority of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck. And it is no surprise, given that inflation has outpaced wage growth for 24 straight months—meaning that under the Biden administration, Americans have received a de facto pay cut.

Americans are cutting back on spending, dipping into savings, or charging expenses to their credit card to help make ends meet. Bloomberg reports on a growing trend of relying on "buy now, pay later" apps for everyday purchases, noting that and I quote:

U.S. consumers are increasingly using such installment loans to pay for everyday items like groceries, highlighting the financial pain wrought by the worst inflation outbreak in four decades.

Credit card debt hit a record high in the final quarter of 2022, and nearly half of Americans are carrying balances now from month to month. More than two-thirds of Americans are saving less than they did a year ago. And the list goes on. Put simply, if President Biden wanted to create more breathing room for Americans, he has failed. In fact, President Biden has taken away Americans' breathing room, and there is little relief in sight.

Now, I don't need to tell anyone that one of the main reasons we are in the midst of this inflation crisis is because of Democrats and the President's decision to pass the so-called American Rescue Plan Act, which was a massive and partisan \$1.9 trillion spending spree that flooded our economy with unnecessary government money.

Democrats were warned that their bill would cause inflation, and they proceeded anyway. And the economy overheated as a result. Even worse, despite steadily climbing inflation in the wake of their bill, Democrats seemed determined not to recognize their mistake. Instead of acknowledging their oversized spending bill helped set off

inflation, Democrats kept pursuing more spending and more damaging economic policies.

There is the \$5 trillion big government vision they called Build Back Better but should probably have been named more aptly "Build Back Broke" or "Bankrupt," the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, which has done nothing to address inflation but has imposed a series of new taxes that are driving up Americans' energy costs.

The President's reckless student loan giveaway, which could end up costing American taxpayers close to a trillion dollars. And there is more. And the bad ideas just keep coming.

The President recently released his budget proposal, which would increase spending every year until the Federal budget reaches an eye-watering \$10 trillion in the year 2033—\$10 trillion. For comparison, let me just point out that the entire Federal budget for 2019—and that is the last budget before the pandemic—was \$4.4 trillion—\$4.4 trillion.

President Biden wants to more than double that: \$4.4 trillion to \$10 trillion. And then there is the latest idea from the White House, which is punishing Americans with good credit scores if they purchase a house. That is right. Think about this one: The Biden administration has announced a new policy which is set to go into effect on May 1st that would impose higher mortgage fees on Americans with higher credit scores, and the highest fees on Americans who make a substantial downpayment.

Now if you save and are able to make a 20 percent downpayment on a home, you are going to pay more under the Biden administration plan.

These higher fees would then go to subsidize mortgages for Americans with lower credit scores. In other words, think about it this way: The Biden administration is targeting hard-working Americans who save, diligently pay their bills, and build good credit, in order to subsidize mortgages for higher risk borrowers.

It is the microcosm of Biden's big government policies. Punish hard work, punish financial discipline, punish success, and redistribute the wealth. Squeeze middle-class Americans. Force hard-working taxpayers to fund Democrats' socialist visions.

We literally are socializing mortgage payments. That is what it amounts to. Nothing more, nothing less. Because, let's be very clear, President Biden likes to talk about forcing better-off Americans to pay for his policies, and he likes to claim that he isn't going to raise taxes on Americans making less than \$400,000 a year. But this new mortgage policy is going to hit thousands and thousands of middle-class Americans making ordinary salaries whose only crime is that they worked hard, saved money, and have been responsible with their debt.

The President can talk all he likes about making wealthy Americans pay